

LUBERTHA JOHNSON: CIVIL RIGHTS EFFORTS IN LAS VEGAS, 1940S-1960S

Interviewee: Lubertha Johnson

Interviewed: 1987-1988

Published: 1988

Interviewer: Jamie Coughtry

UNOHP Catalog #148

Description

This oral history with Lubertha Johnson documents one black professional woman's service in the cause of civil rights. From the formative phase of the modern black struggle for equality in the 1940s, through the high tide of activism in the 1960s and early 1970s, Lubertha Johnson remained in the vanguard of the movement in Las Vegas, Nevada, patiently chipping away at the local edifice of racism.

Born in 1906 in rural Mississippi, Mrs. Johnson (nee Miller) left the deep South in response to declining economic opportunities and increasing racial hostility. In 1923, she and her parents made the difficult decision to follow other family members to Chicago.

Already educated beyond the dreams of most southern women of her background, the young Lubertha augmented a boarding school degree with college classes in education and social work in Chicago and Nashville. During the 1930s, Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal provided her with a job in a local WPA recreation program. Equally important was her introduction to the sophisticated worlds of northern black culture and politics. In Chicago one could not only read about black life across the country in journals such as the Chicago Defender, one could also work through the Urban League and the NAACP to improve that life for oneself and one's people.

By the early 1940s, her father's declining health necessitated a second move, this time to the West. After a brief interlude in Pasadena, California, Mrs. Johnson settled in Las Vegas in November, 1943. After a six-month stay, she returned to Pasadena for a short time, continuing her work in the field of public housing, this time for the Urban League. Within a year, she was back in Las Vegas, where she resides today in her Westside home.

Despite the vast differences between the dusty desert gambling oasis and her previous homes, there was one constant. Jim Crow preceded her to the southern part of the Silver State and was everywhere in evidence by the time of her arrival. Indeed, blacks who had thronged to the area from the South to get their first crack at high-wage, wartime industrial employment had already dubbed Las Vegas "the Mississippi of the West." City officials took the lead in the racial transformation of the city by rezoning the small pre-war black residential area known as Westside for commercial and residential development. Restrictive licensing and housing covenants then kept blacks there, creating a modern ghetto. This was part of a concerted effort to discourage black defense plant workers from staying in the county, and to segregate thoroughly those who did remain.

Lubertha Johnson's first job in Clark County was with the federally-funded Carver Park housing project across the highway from the Basic Magnesium, Incorporated (BMI) plant in Henderson. As recreation director, Mrs. Johnson found herself responsible for maintaining morale among black families residing in this so-called "Model Negro

Continued on next page.

Description (continued)

Community.” Only a month before her arrival, black workers coming off a shift were ordered to change and shower in facilities separate from those used by their white co-workers before joining their families across the road in segregated apartments. Ultimately, however, most blacks in fact preferred the rude, crowded conditions of the segregated Las Vegas Westside.

Lubertha Johnson balked, too. “I had plenty of courage in those days,” she recalls in this memoir, which details a life of principle lived primarily in the civil rights trenches. After the war, she and her allies, following the lead of blacks in the South, drove Jim Crow from one haunt after another: hospitals, casinos, theaters, schools and housing. When federal anti-poverty funds became available in the mid-1960s, she was instrumental in launching and guiding Operation Independence, a comprehensive anti-poverty program in Las Vegas. The legacy of that effort survives today in a preschool service of the same name.

**LUBERTHA JOHNSON:
CIVIL RIGHTS EFFORTS
IN LAS VEGAS, 1940S-1960S**

**LUBERTHA JOHNSON:
CIVIL RIGHTS EFFORTS
IN LAS VEGAS, 1940S-1960S**

MADE POSSIBLE BY A GRANT FROM THE
NEVADA DEPARTMENT OF MUSEUMS AND HISTORY

An Oral History Conducted by Jamie Coughtry
Edited by Jamie Coughtry and R.T. King

University of Nevada Oral History Program

Copyright 1988
University of Nevada Oral History Program
Mail Stop 0324
Reno, Nevada 89557
unohp@unr.edu
<http://www.unr.edu/oralhistory>

All rights reserved. Published 1988.
Printed in the United States of America

Publication Staff:
Director: R.T. King

University of Nevada Oral History Program Use Policy

All UNOHP interviews are copyrighted materials. They may be downloaded and/or printed for personal reference and educational use, but not republished or sold. Under “fair use” standards, excerpts of up to 1000 words may be quoted for publication without UNOHP permission as long as the use is non-commercial and materials are properly cited. The citation should include the title of the work, the name of the person or people interviewed, the date of publication or production, and the fact that the work was published or produced by the University of Nevada Oral History Program (and collaborating institutions, when applicable). Requests for permission to quote for other publication, or to use any photos found within the transcripts, should be addressed to the UNOHP, Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, Reno, NV 89557-0324. Original recordings of most UNOHP interviews are available for research purposes upon request.

CONTENTS

Preface to the Digital Edition	ix
Original Preface	xi
Introduction	xiii
1. Growing Up in Mississippi and Chicago	1
2. Carver Park, 1943-1944	11
3. Life on the Westside, 1940s-1950s	27
4. Pervasive Discrimination, 1940s-1950s	33
5. A Segregated School System	37
6. Bonanza Village	41
7. The NAACP and Changing Racial Attitudes	43
8. Blacks and Local Politics	49
9. The Las Vegas Press and the Westside; The Moulin Rouge Agreement	53
10. The Economic Opportunity Board and Operation Independence	61

11. Epilogue	67
Photographs	69
Original Index: For Reference Only	73

PREFACE TO THE DIGITAL EDITION

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about significant events, people, places, and activities in twentieth and twenty-first century Nevada and the West.

The UNOHP wishes to make the information in its oral histories accessible to a broad range of patrons. To achieve this goal, its transcripts must speak with an intelligible voice. However, no type font contains symbols for physical gestures and vocal modulations which are integral parts of verbal communication. When human speech is represented in print, stripped of these signals, the result can be a morass of seemingly tangled syntax and incomplete sentences—totally verbatim transcripts sometimes verge on incoherence. Therefore, this transcript has been lightly edited.

While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

As with all of our oral histories, while we can vouch for the authenticity of the interviews in the UNOHP collection, we advise readers to keep in mind that these are remembered pasts, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. We can state, however, that the transcripts accurately reflect the oral history recordings on which they were based. Accordingly, each transcript should be approached with the

same prudence that the intelligent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of the individuals who were interviewed, and not the opinions of the UNOHP.

In order to standardize the design of all UNOHP transcripts for the online database, most have been reformatted, a process that was completed in 2012. This document may therefore differ in appearance and pagination from earlier printed versions. Rather than compile entirely new indexes for each volume, the UNOHP has made each transcript fully searchable electronically. If a previous version of this volume existed, its original index has been appended to this document for reference only. A link to the entire catalog can be found online at <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/>.

For more information on the UNOHP or any of its publications, please contact the University of Nevada Oral History Program at Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, 89557-0324 or by calling 775/784-6932.

Alicia Barber
Director, UNOHP
July 2012

ORIGINAL PREFACE

Since 1965 the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) has produced over 200 works similar to the one at hand. Following the precedent established by Allan Nevins at Columbia University in 1948 (and perpetuated since by academic programs such as ours throughout the English-speaking world) these manuscripts are called oral histories. Unfortunately, some confusion surrounds the meaning of the term. To the extent that these 'oral' histories can be read, they are not oral, and while they are useful historical sources, they are not themselves history. Still, custom is a powerful force; historical and cultural records that originate in tape-recorded interviews are almost uniformly labeled 'oral histories', and our program follows that usage.

Among oral history programs, differences abound in the way information is collected, processed and presented. At one end of a spectrum are some that claim to find scholarly value in interviews which more closely resemble spontaneous encounters than they do organized efforts to collect

information. For those programs, any preparation is too much. The interviewer operates the recording equipment and serves as the immediate audience, but does not actively participate beyond encouraging the chronicler to keep talking. Serendipity is the principal determinant of the historical worth of information thus collected.

The University of Nevada's program strives to be considerably more rigorous in selecting chroniclers, and in preparing for and focusing interviews. When done by the UNOHP, these firsthand accounts are meant to serve the function of primary source documents, as valuable in the process of historiography as the written records with which historians customarily work. However, while the properly conducted oral history is a reliable source, verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the UNOHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, and that the chronicler has approved the edited manuscript, but it

does not assert that all are entirely free of error. Accordingly, our oral histories should be approached with the same caution that the prudent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries and other sources of historical information.

Each finished manuscript is the product of a collaboration--its structure influenced by the directed questioning of an informed, well-prepared interviewer, and its articulation refined through editing. While the words in this published oral history are essentially those of Mrs. Johnson, the text is not a *verbatim* transcription of the interview as it occurred. In producing a manuscript, it is the practice of the UNOHP to employ the language of the chronicler, but to edit for clarity and readability. By shifting text when necessary, by polishing syntax, and by deleting or subsuming the questions of the interviewer, a first-person narrative with chronological and topical order is created. Mrs. Johnson has reviewed the finished manuscript of her oral history and affirmed in writing that it is an accurate representation of her statements.

The UNOHP realizes that there will be some researchers who prefer to take their oral history straight, without the editing that was necessary to produce this text; they are directed to the tape recording. Copies of all or part of this work and the tapes from which it is derived are available from:

The University of Nevada
Oral History Program
Mailstop 0324
University of Nevada-Reno
89557

INTRODUCTION

“One day I’m going to do something to change this situation,” vowed young Lubertha Johnson in the wake of her grandfather’s violent death at the hands of white Mississippi bigots. The following narrative of one black professional woman’s service in the cause of civil rights amply documents the fulfillment of that grief-inspired pledge. From the formative phase of the modern black struggle for equality in the 1940s, through the high tide of activism in the 1960s and early 1970s, Lubertha Johnson remained in the vanguard of the movement in Las Vegas, Nevada, patiently chipping away at the local edifice of racism.

Born in turn-of-the-century rural Mississippi, Ms. Johnson (nee Miller) followed a familiar path out of the deep South in response to declining economic opportunities and increasing racial hostility. Both mechanization and lynching rates, for example, were on the rise when her parents made the difficult decision to follow other family members to Chicago with their only

daughter, leaving a large, loving, extended family clan behind.

Already educated beyond the dreams of most southern women of her background, the young Lubertha augmented a boarding school degree with college classes in education and social work in Chicago and Nashville. During the 1930s, Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal provided her with a job in a local WPA recreation program. Equally important was her introduction to the sophisticated worlds of northern black culture and politics. In Chicago one could not only read about black life across the country in journals such as the *Chicago Defender*, one could also work through the Urban League and the NAACP to improve that life, for oneself and one’s people.

By the early 1940s, her father’s declining health necessitated a second move, this time to the far West. After a brief interlude in Pasadena, California, Mrs. Johnson settled in Las Vegas in November, 1943. After a six month stay, she returned to Pasadena for a short time, continuing her work in the field

of public housing, this time for the Urban League. Within a year, she was back in Las Vegas, where she resides today in her Westside home.

Despite the vast differences between the dusty desert gambling oasis and her previous homes, there was one constant. Jim Crow preceded her to the southern part of the Silver State and was everywhere in evidence by the time of her arrival. Indeed, blacks who had thronged to the area from the South to get their first crack at high-wage, wartime industrial employment had already dubbed Las Vegas “the Mississippi of the West.” City officials took the lead in the racial transformation of the city by rezoning the small pre-war black residential area known as Westside for commercial and residential development. Restrictive licensing and housing covenants then kept blacks there, creating a modern ghetto. This was part of a concerted effort to discourage black defense plant workers from staying in the county, and to segregate thoroughly those who did remain.

Lubertha Johnson’s first job in Clark County was with the federally-funded Carver Park housing project across the highway from the mammoth Basic Magnesium, Incorporated (BMI) plant in Henderson. As recreation director, Mrs. Johnson found herself responsible for maintaining morale among black families residing in this so-called “Model Negro Community.” Only a month before her arrival, black workers coming off a shift were ordered to change and shower in facilities separate from those used by their white co-workers before joining their families across the road in segregated apartments. Ultimately, however, most blacks in fact preferred the rude, crowded conditions of the segregated Las Vegas Westside.

Lubertha Johnson balked, too. “I had plenty of courage in those days,” she recalls

in this memoir, which details a life of principle lived primarily in the civil rights trenches. After the war, she and her allies, following the lead of blacks in the South, drove Jim Crow from one haunt after another: hospitals; hotels; casinos; theaters; schools and housing. When federal anti-poverty funds became available in the mid-1960s, she was instrumental in launching and guiding Operation Independence, a comprehensive anti-poverty program in Las Vegas. The legacy of that effort survives today in a preschool service of the same name.

Critical as the history of these issues is, both for citizens of the state and historians generally, it is still a story largely unwritten. With some notable exceptions, the black history of Las Vegas has, until recently, remained locked in the memories of those who lived it. The University of Nevada-Reno Oral History Program is to be commended for obtaining and preserving in this volume an expansive, vivid and personal account of a momentous era—one that some would rather forget and that others, by word and deed, seem already to have forgotten. Now, fortunately, the efforts and experiences of Lubertha Johnson and many others are being recorded, contributing to a deeper and more accurate understanding of the history of Nevada.

Jay Coughtry
University of Nevada-Las Vegas
July, 1988



LUBERTHA JOHNSON
1987

Photo by Jamie Coughtry

GROWING UP IN MISSISSIPPI AND CHICAGO

I was born in Ackerman, Mississippi, in 1906, the only child of Golden and Mary Miller. My parents were from Mississippi. My mother was actually raised in a little town called Kosciusko. While visiting some relatives up in the town where we eventually lived, she met my father. They were married in Ackerman, Mississippi.

My father had a farm that his father, Joe, had left him. In fact, my grandfather owed \$40 on the farm when he passed away, which was quite a sum of money in those days. My paternal grandfather was a slave, and had gotten this home just after slavery was abolished.

As a young man he spent most of his life in the woods, because he refused to do all of the things that he was expected to do as a slave. He didn't come out of the woods very much until after the slaves were freed. He stayed there for several years. I never knew my paternal grandfather, but I lived with my father and my grandmother. Everyone always talked about what happened during the slave years. I don't remember too many

outstanding things that my grandmother told me, only that she never found her relatives after slavery. She had lived with several slave owners. She said that some of the owners were good to the slaves and some of them were not. She did tell me about meeting her husband on one of the plantations. They went through what was called a 'marriage'. I think they jumped over a broom or some such thing! They managed to get back together after the slaves were freed.

As I say, my grandfather died before I was born, but my grandmother lived many, many years after that. Her name was Paulina. Now, I expect that should have been Pauline, but the slaves sometimes didn't get the right name if they named their children after their owner's children.

* * * * *

My great-grandmother, Jane, the mother of my mother's father, was quite a character. At some time *all* of the children and grandchildren lived in her home. When

someone married, they lived there first before they got out and got their own homes, because she had something more than 100 acres of land. She had been a slave, and had gotten--I don't know how--the home of one of the slave owners. It hadn't been her master's. She was part Indian, and perhaps came into this property as an Indian, so my grandfather Jack was part Indian too. Great-grandmother Jane had everything on that place that anybody would need, like cribs and cabins and places for milk, places for everything, and a *huge* log house, well-furnished. She had five children; she outlived *all* of her children. She lived to be 107.

I lived with my great-grandmother until I was 11. I lived with her because my mother was a hard worker. It was just easier to let me stay with her, because she wanted so much to have me stay with her. By this time all my great-grandmother's children were married and gone, so my mother let me live with her. It was about ten miles from where my parents lived, and we had to walk most of the time from her house to our house.

My great-grandmother taught me everything. She had a spinning wheel, and she taught me how to make cloth, to spin. She taught me how to knit and to dye. She got dyes from different trees. If she wanted to dye something purple or red or whatever, she knew how to get the material from the trees in order to dye it. She had me milking the cows; I had to sit up on a stool to do it. She had me doing everything. I worked in the field, and everything that she did, I did. She had a brother, and they raised rice and corn, cotton --not much cotton--and melons. They had a huge orchard with all kinds of fruit.

My great-grandmother Jane was an attractive person, even up until the time we left Mississippi. She was a little over 100 then, and she wore her corset every day. I suppose

her being real tall and straight came from the Indian. She resembled the Indians quite a bit.

* * * * *

My grandfather, my mother's father, had been murdered by white people. Grandfather's name was Jack Miller. His mother, my great-grandmother, lived quite a distance from where he lived. My grandfather lived in the little town of Ackerman. My great-grandmother had a horse, and he went to the little town where she lived to get her horse to plow his garden. He didn't take any money with him, because he didn't know that he was going to need a bridle or a collar for the horse. So he went to this little town and borrowed \$4 from a man he knew when he had lived in the town before. He took the horse back to his home in the next little town of Ackerman and told this man that he would pay him his money the following Saturday.

On Saturday everybody went to town. My grandfather was working on the other side of town from where this man lived. He ran into my grandfather when he was on his way home. He demanded his money. My grandfather said, "I'm on my way home, and I'll get your money and bring it back to you." But he wanted the money then. Apparently, he had already made up his mind to use this as an excuse to beat up my grandfather. As my grandfather started to his home, the man stopped my grandfather in front of a store owned by a man who knew my father and mother. He told them what he was going to do to my grandfather.

The man said to him, "No, I wouldn't do that." He said, "I'll tell you what: I'll pay you the money, and then when Jack comes back, he can pay me."

And he did; this man paid him the money. But he still went up the street behind my

grandfather and had a large number of people already at the end of the street ready to beat him up. So they did; they beat him and left him for dead. He didn't die immediately; he died about three weeks later. He was up and walked around. In the meantime, the horse had gotten away. While he was out looking for him, he fell into one of these borrow pits under the railroad track. Some white kids found him the next morning, dead.

The next morning my great-grandmother came--that was his mother. She had walked some 10 miles or so. Nobody had told her anything. But when she came and knocked on the door and my mother let her in, she said, "Something has happened to my boy." Finally, somebody rode out and told us, while she was there, that he had been found. Of course, my mother was *extremely* bitter. Mother had a very strong personality. She was part Indian, and a *very, very* strong woman in every way. That really affected her as long as she lived. Nothing was ever done about that.

As a result of these terrible incidents, I had a fear of whites. I was a sensitive child. I was afraid to the extent that when we later moved to Chicago, and I was supposed to attend the schools there, I refused to go. I didn't go to school, because I said, "I will *never* go to school with white people." So I went back South to school.

* * * * *

My father was a farmer, and he helped to build the railroads across Mississippi. When the crop was laid by, he would go and work on the railroad to earn a little money. This was not anything unusual--a lot of black men worked on the railroads. They laid the ties across the tracks and did whatever they had to do to make them stay in place. He'd be gone for at least four to five months of the year.

My father was quite an interesting person as far as I'm concerned. He was a very handsome man. I think the thing I liked most about him was that he didn't know it; he never thought of himself as being handsome. As a young man he lived on a farm, but he was quite ambitious. He wanted my mother and I to have the best of everything.

We had 65 acres. They grew cotton, corn, peanuts--a *lot* of peanuts--and they had cows. They had horses and eventually a little wagon and finally a buggy. We were really getting up in the world when we got the buggy.

My father used a mule to plow the crops. They did everything else by hand. They picked the cotton by hand. I didn't do much of anything; when we left Mississippi I was still fairly young.

When I lived on the farm we were quite well off. Unusually well, I should say, because my parents were both ambitious. For instance, my father taught himself music to the extent that he was a member of the brass band in that part of the country. In those days, most of the music that was provided for dances, picnics, or whatever for white people was provided by black people. (We were *Negroes* then; we didn't say blacks, ever!) My father would be paid for these jobs. My father was ambitious because his mother was a hard worker, and so was his father. And the fact that my grandfather was able to live alone in the woods and find ways of taking care of himself--feeding himself and everything--indicated that *he* was quite an unusual person.

After his father passed away, my father built on to the house. He and my mother used to go into the woods and cut the trees, and then they would send them to the sawmill. He built this very nice home.

Whatever new things came out, we always had one of the first ones--for instance, Victrolas, as they were called in those days.

When pianos became popular, we had a player piano. Anything that made life more pleasant, I had. I had beautiful clothes. We had these things because of the money made by my father and my mother. They sold some of the cotton and peanuts and peas and that sort of thing. They always had a little extra money, especially at Christmastime after the crops were gathered and sold.

There were white farmers in our area, and we were better off than many of them. They were white; they were poor. They didn't go out and work like my father and mother did. Whatever they made on their farms, that's all they had, because they didn't do extra things. If he didn't work on the railroad, my father worked in the sawmill five or six miles away.

My mother did everything on the farm that my father did. She did the plowing; she did the hoeing; she gathered the crops. She did washing and ironing at night for the people who lived in the town of Ackerman. She would hitch up the wagon at first and later hitch up the buggy, drive four miles to town and pick up the clothes and bring them back home, wash and iron them and take them back.

She did this work in order that I could go 40 miles away to Central Mississippi College--a boarding school that was called a college, but was actually a high school. Where we lived, there was only a little grammar school that went up to about sixth grade. The boarding school was in Kosciusko, Mississippi, where one of my mother's sisters lived. Part of the time, I lived with my aunt, but the last three years I lived on the campus.

The boarding school was for blacks. Everything in Mississippi, believe me, was always strictly black or white. There was no in-between. For that part of the country it was a good school. I started there in grade school, and I only went to a second year of

high school. Then we moved away from Mississippi.

My parents were happy to send me away to school. They thought it was grand. That's all they *really* worked for--so that they'd give me an education which they never had. They both said, "We're going to see that Babe has a good education." Both of my parents had learned to read and write. My father taught me the alphabet. I was reading long before I went to school because of that, and I read more than other children like myself. I was surprised when I went to school and children were not reading. I didn't realize that you had to go to school to learn to read. My father was interested and saw that I got books, and sat down and tried to read with me--I think that was a little unusual in Mississippi. Both my father and my mother were very much concerned about my education. I don't quite know why, because neither of them had much education. I went away to boarding school when I was only 11, and that was unusual.

It was unusual that my parents were literate, but in spite of the slave owners preventing anyone from teaching the young Negro children, many people did it anyway. Therefore, here and there, there were a number of people who could read somewhat and write. Not a great many, but a good many who learned enough to become interested in getting an education. I was interested in everything that was readable. I wasn't so good in math, but in the other things I did quite well. I won a couple of medals. Oratory was one of my favorites. Each year we had an oratorical contest, and I always did very well in that. I guess I was a good student, because I got two awards for outstanding scholarship. I don't think my parents ever really had any specific expectations for me. I think my mother thought maybe I would teach. They

just wanted me to have the education and to do whatever I could. They expected me to do something outstanding, whatever it was. They just thought that if you get an education, you can do things. That's about the way they summed it up.

* * * * *

My family was very religious. We went to the Baptist church, although I later attended the Methodist church. During the time I was in boarding school, I also attended the school for training ministers. I spent at least one full year there. There was a young fellow who I knew, and we planned what we were going to do, although we were quite young. He was about 14, and I was 13. We were going to Africa. He was going to study medicine, which he did. I was going to be a missionary. I'd read a few books about Africa, and I had met a family from Africa. They talked about how wonderful it was, and how much help they needed. We were going to help them. They talked about how badly the people needed medical care, so that is what my friend was going to do.

I never did think about going to Africa to make a home, although at that time there was a lot of talk about going back to Africa. But I didn't really have any ideas about going there to make a home. Once in a while you met people from Africa, which was quite interesting, but the picture that we had of Africa at that time actually indicated that all of the people were savage, and that they were desperately in need of someone to come in and help them. The books and articles that were written about Africa were all very exciting and indicated that there was no help at all for the people, that they had no opportunity to get an education, and, therefore, they were really savages.

I was aware of the back-to-Africa movement at that time. There was some talk of it, especially when people came around to talk about Africa. For instance, there were always a few people, like ministers, who went to Africa and came back. Their stories were always different. I suppose that was because some of them went to one part of Africa, and some went to other areas. Most of the people were really impressed by the things that the missionaries wrote, because that's about all we really knew, or thought we knew. We found that many of those stories that were written were not at all true. Somebody decided that they were going to write a book about Africa. They had never been to Africa. [laughs] They never really knew too much. But the books sold anyway, especially to the people in the country who didn't know what was happening.

Of course, I knew of Marcus Garvey, because I've always read everything that I could get my hands on about everybody that I could, even as a young child. [Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) was a charismatic black leader who organized the first important black nationalist movement in the U.S. The Universal Negro Improvement Association, based in New York City's Harlem from 1919 until its dissolution in 1926, sought to build a black-governed nation in Africa.--Ed.] The subjects I was most interested in were people like George Washington Carver. I certainly thought he was a wonderful person because of what he had done with the peanut. That was quite interesting.

In Mississippi I remember hardly interacting with whites. Once in a while the family living next to us would come up to our house and maybe borrow some corn meal. If we needed something we'd go down to their home, but it was not like an average relationship. We were *fairly* friendly. We

thought they were very fine people, but later on it turned out to be a tragic relationship.

* * * * *

I was 17 when we moved to Chicago in 1923. My father wanted a better life, and he wanted to get away from this situation in Mississippi. You never knew when somebody might come to your home and pick you up, take you out, beat you up, and you'd never be heard from again. And he wanted to make more money. A number of people went to Chicago and came back and told about the money that you could make there. My mother had a brother in Chicago, who had gone there because he was dodging the draft during World War I. He said that he would *never* go to fight the white man's war. He never did. He said that he wouldn't go, and anybody who came after him would not go either. My father also had a brother there. I was unhappy about having to leave my friends, but I wanted to go, because I was unhappy, too, about the race situation.

My mother wanted to go, and she didn't want to go. She hated to leave her friends and her relatives--her grandmother, who was over 100 years old at that time. She went along with my father the first time. I was left to live with my grandmother until they came back, because my father made the agreement with my mother that they would go and make some money and come back. He was pretty smart. They saved \$500.

When they came back, they were just rich, so they started the farm again. My father went out and got a job, this time loading ties. He said he couldn't stand it; he just couldn't stand it. Unknown to my mother, he had hidden enough money for him to get back to Chicago. He told my mother and me that he would go

back and make some money, and then he would come back after a while and do some more work on the farm. My mother said fine. She waited for the next payday when he could send some money, and she just took off. She sent him a telegram telling him when she'd be there. [laughs]

We went by train. We had to go to a second town, because they wouldn't sell us tickets...they had sold so many tickets. Many people had left town, and they didn't want the Negroes to leave, because then they'd have to do a lot of the work that the blacks had done. My mother had a friend who had come from another town. He took us in his wagon to this town, and we were able to buy tickets. That was the first time *I* had ever been out of Mississippi. My mother had been in Chicago and stayed there almost a year before they returned to Mississippi.

* * * * *

After we permanently moved to Chicago, it seems that my father gave his farm to his sister. One of our white neighbor's sons, who was much older than I was, for some reason had an attitude toward these relatives of mine that was not as good as what we had had when we were there. Apparently, somebody's pigs got out. The neighbor said that my uncle's pigs had eaten his corn. My uncle didn't even have any pigs.

One Sunday morning when my uncle was on his way to church, the neighbor had hid somewhere in the woods to beat him up. My uncle was an older man--crippled, blind in one eye--but he was strong enough to take the stick away from him and talk to him about how he was so disappointed. My uncle never thought the neighbor would do anything like that. My uncle went on his way to church and

told his friends about it. They told him that he better not go home that night, which he didn't. He went to a friend's home, and they got the feeling that the neighbor would come looking for my uncle. They did go over to the home to try and find out where my uncle was.

When they didn't find him there, they took two of his boys, put them in a car and tortured them until they told where their father was. So they went and found him. He was hidden in the closet of his friend's home. They considered my uncle dangerous, although he had nothing at all to fight anybody with. They shot him in the closet. Then they took him out, and they fastened him to one of their automobiles, and they just dragged his body all over the country. They had about 40 people with them. They realized that he was dead. After a while they just threw his body into what they called a borrow pit in Mississippi. It was water by the railroad track, over which a trestle would pass.

Nothing was ever done about it. However, there was a little man in Mississippi, a white man, who had some kind of a political position. My uncle's family had moved to Memphis, Tennessee, while they were deciding what they could do. This white man ordered a train to come from Memphis back to Mississippi in order to have a trial. But some people turned out of jail the ones in Mississippi who had done the shooting. So my uncle's family went back to Memphis and, of course, nothing was ever done about it. I have no idea what ever happened to my uncle's farm.

* * * * *

When I got to Chicago I was naturally overwhelmed by all the high buildings. I had never seen any such thing. There were

policemen at the station saying, "Step up! Step up! You're in Chicago now!" [laughs] And I thought, "Well, what are they going to do to us?" Of course, nothing happened.

That night we stayed in a little town called Melrose Park where my father's brother lived. That was strictly an Italian town. There were a few whites and a few black people there, too. The Italians were having an annual picnic. They had--I didn't know whether they were guns--firecrackers and bombs, I think. That night they shot off all these things, and I thought, "Oh, we're surely going to be killed," or the world was coming to an end...I wasn't sure which. We got accustomed to that. These Italian people were wonderful. They were very, very nice.

We lived there about a year or so, and then we moved into another town across the tracks. Maywood was a very nice town. We stayed there 21 years. My father worked in a big steel mill. Most everybody worked in the steel mill. I don't remember the name of it, but it was close to home. He liked making money--he liked it very much.

My mother also worked in Chicago. She did what they called day work, and they got pretty good money. [Day work refers to household work--laundry, for example--done for white people.--Ed.] She'd travel into the city. I tried to get a little work for a while, but then I went to school. I went south to a college in Nashville, Tennessee.

Race relations in the North were very good. We rented for a while, and we lived upstairs over white people, downstairs under white people. We didn't have any problems at all. I had heard people talk about what it was like in Chicago. Maywood was a Jewish town. Practically everything--schools, the teachers, all the business owners--were Jewish. There were several little cities like that--little

suburban towns--where Jewish people lived or Italian people. Maywood is not like that now. In fact, there are a *lot* of black people in the town now.

Even when there were race problems occasionally, it was *nothing* to compare to what happened in Mississippi. We thought it was very good. However, I still had this feeling, realizing that I was different and never really knowing what might happen. So, like I said, I refused to go to school with white people. I just couldn't stand that.

Many people in Mississippi who had been to Chicago or knew something about what happened there talked about how different it was. I didn't begin to see this for quite a long time. I didn't give myself a chance in the beginning, but later I did go to school. I went to Chicago Music College and the Y College and I met not only white people from the South, but white people who lived in Chicago. I met friendly white people especially at the Chicago Music College. I met many people from the South and found that they were *extremely* friendly and very anxious to be friendly with me.

I'll tell you something: white people in the South--though many of these things happened that I have talked about--*actually, in fact*, are more friendly to blacks than the northern or the eastern white people. In Chicago and other cities in that area, white people more or less follow the law with regard to civil rights. But it was a sort of cool relationship, and I think it still is to a great extent. However, when southern white people are friendly, they're much more so. They accepted the black people.

For instance, the fellows I knew, especially, wanted to be friendly. I would pull away from them, and they said, "Don't you know that we love our black people?" (We were Negroes then.) "Don't you know that we *want* to be

around you?" And they do, they do. I don't mean they all are that way, but they're *much* friendlier than the white people who live in the areas where they are not likely to do any of the things that we talked about whites doing in the South. You can have a warm sort of friendship, and I think it's because they actually *know* black people much better. Why? They've been eating with them; they've been sleeping with them. [laughs] We nurse their babies. In other words, we are very close in most cases.

When whites from the South came north, that gave them an opportunity to interact with blacks in a different way, because they didn't have the pressure of other people who were not friendly. You see, there are many white people, even in the South, who *wanted* to be friendly. But because of the other people who had a different attitude, they were almost afraid, because *they* would be more or less ostracized and would be called "nigger lovers." I'm sure you've heard that expression. But still, they even managed to intermarry in some cases. Sometimes it was a dangerous thing to do, but it happened many times.

I even met whites in organizations like the NAACP. In fact, the white people, especially the Jewish people, were *very* supportive. For instance, Urban League was practically supported by mostly Jewish people. When black people went to Chicago, they lived among Jews, and these were the people who rented them houses. Jews were generally supportive and tried to do something to remedy the kind of situation where black people were continually looked upon as being inferior. The NAACP and the Urban League were generally supported by both the white people and the Jewish people. (I don't know what the difference is.) [laughs]

In Chicago I became very much involved in civil rights activities, and I tried to write

about the situation. I made every effort to meet and to know all of these people who were outstanding in the field of civil rights. In fact, I always took every opportunity available to become active. I wanted to do something. When my grandfather was killed, I said to myself, "One day I'm going to do something to change this situation."

In a way, the death of my grandfather was a real turning point in my life, but this had happened to so many other people. It wasn't anything new. It was just that he was very close to me. And I had a grandmother and a grandfather who had been slaves. My great-grandmother had had my grandfather before the slaves were freed. So with this kind of living every day with people who had been slaves, this was a big part, too, of my activist inclinations. It just became a part of my life from a young child, perhaps because I was reading more than the average person. I was reading before I went to school.

In Chicago we learned about all of the outstanding black people. Even as a young person in my teens, I went to NAACP meetings, and that's where I really learned all about the black leaders. I think when I grew a little older, W. E. B. DuBois was my hero, because he was active with the NAACP. In fact, he was one of the founders. He wrote a lot, and I knew more about him because of his writing. There was the *Chicago Defender*. They wrote about all of these people and their speeches.

* * * * *

I finished high school, and went two years to college. I didn't go back to Mississippi; I went to Nashville, Tennessee, to Roger Williams University. It was an all black school. I didn't study any particular profession. There were several black schools in Nashville; it was really a college town.

I planned to pursue a career in teaching, but it got into the middle of the Great Depression. My father lost his job. He wasn't working at the steel mill at that time, he was working at the telephone company. He couldn't get a job *anyplace*. That Depression was something in Chicago--every place. I never got back to college in Nashville. I went to the Chicago Musical College and took some courses, working part-time.

During those first years of the Depression we managed fairly well, because we had some savings. My father got a job with the boys in the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps, a federal work-relief program] camps in Illinois. He couldn't stay home because of his work. That's when he had his first attack of asthma. He loved the CCC job, because he taught the boys to play music and sing. In the daytime they would go out and work in the forest and build bridges and things like that. In the evening when they came home, they would do their music, their singing, and he had these singing groups. He liked that very much.

I worked. I had to move away from home to get a job. That's where I started my work as a recreation worker. I took the course in recreation, and then I went out and did the recreation program for one of the schools. That was a government-sponsored program. I want you to know I was rich. I made \$94 a month, and that was good money.

When my father came home from the CCC camp he became quite ill with asthma. At that time I was still working; I was working with young children. I had gone to Pestalozzi-Froebel Teachers College in Chicago and taken some courses in early childhood education. People kept saying, "Well, why don't you go West? Go to California, that's where the sunshine spends the winter." It didn't spend the winter there after we got there!

The pastor from our church had moved to Pasadena, and his wife drove back to Maywood. In 1941 I got her to take my father and my mother to Pasadena. My father soon found employment with Sears in Las Vegas, and my parents lived there briefly. They returned to Pasadena because my mother was unhappy in Las Vegas. I stayed in Chicago, because in the Depression I had a very good job with the Chicago Mail Order Company.

I was working for the Urban League before that. We had an experimental thing. There were still a lot of places where Negroes did not work. Urban League got me a job with the Chicago Mail Order Company. They hired 12 women, and I was one of them. I supervised the girls who did the entry jobs. It paid pretty good.

The next year I went out to Pasadena to visit my father and mother. My father did not want to stay in Pasadena; he'd just had it. I couldn't talk him into staying, because *I* wasn't there. He did miss me--he was the most devoted father--but I got him to promise that he would stay in Pasadena. I told him I'd come out every year to see him. We would never have left Chicago, had it not been for his health.

In 1943 I moved out to Pasadena and immediately got a job in public housing for the Urban League. I only lived in Pasadena a few months, then moved to Las Vegas.

CARVER PARK, 1943-1944

I finally came to Las Vegas in November, 1943. I knew a man from Chicago who was an attorney named Herman K. Barnett. He had left Chicago, where he had had some problems somehow. He was the first black assistant state's attorney in Illinois. He came to Las Vegas to manage Carver Park. At the time Basic Magnesium, Incorporated (BMI) was located near what would become Henderson, Nevada. [BMI was a major wartime industrial plant with a number of housing arrangements for workers. Carver Park was the black housing project.--Ed.] Many people had left Chicago and had gone to California. Mr. Barnett had been working there. He had been active in many organizations like the NAACP. He was quite active in politics in Los Angeles, and he knew a person who had something to do with setting up everything for BMI, and who got Mr. Barnett to come up to take over this management job for Carver Park. Mr. Barnett did not have for Carver Park any vision of the kind of place it should be that I knew of. He was quite a politician and was

interested in the job because it paid very well.

Mr. Barnett was looking for someone to do recreation guidance for war workers. He contacted me and asked me to come up right away, which I did. I took this job at Carver Park, which had been built as housing units for Negroes. At that time black people lived one place and the white people lived in another place. They built homes in Victory Village, but they were strictly for white people. A lot of black people had come here from the South, but there was really no place for them to stay. They came into West Las Vegas, because this was the oldest part of town, and they built shacks and put up tents and things like that while they were getting around to building Carver Park for blacks. But then, blacks would not move out of West Las Vegas. Only about 40 families moved out to Carver Park. [The figure of 40 families refers only to the time Mrs. Johnson was there. More families moved later on.--Ed.]

Black people were angry because all of the housing was available to the whites

and none available to the blacks. They had all those new houses that they built at the plant, but black people couldn't live in them. So they said they just weren't going to move. They were making good money, and they didn't have to spend much money to live over in West Las Vegas. That's one of the things that made them stay. They had these little, cheap houses. You could almost steal enough lumber to build a shack. You could go out to Nellis Air Force Base where they used to throw lumber away--just piles and piles. They could go out to the plant and pick up some lumber, and we did the same thing. We went out on the desert and picked up enough lumber to build on to the little house on the property we later bought on Sunset Road. You couldn't buy lumber in those days. So, like I said, blacks didn't move out there to Carver Park. We didn't fill the place up. Finally, they had to divide the property at Carver Park and put white people in one part of it and black people in another.

Carver Park was just a little black world. I understood it quite well. It was *completely* separate. It was more like going back to Mississippi, although most of the people there came from Arkansas and Louisiana. Still, they were southern people who had just come directly from the South. I knew why they were there. I knew that many of the people were the unfortunate people in the South. Most of them had come from the areas that were similar to what we created at Carver Park. In others words, they were more or less the have-nots, and they came because they wanted to earn more money. They had nothing to lose by coming to Las Vegas. But the majority of the black people did *not* live in Carver Park; they lived in West Las Vegas.

I understood what the problems of the people in Carver Park were because I interviewed many people. The majority were what you could call functionally illiterate. I interviewed them because I came here to do what was called "recreation for war workers." I was trying to find out what their interests were. There was *nothing at all* for people to do--not any kind of activity, not even a church, which was most important in their lives. I was able to get a moving picture projector and show pictures, and I got a piano and we danced.

The manager asked me to get as much background as I could on these people--where they had lived and what they had done in the South. It was somewhat different from my experiences, because in different states in the South it's like any other place--some people in certain areas were perhaps farmers; they'd been farmers and had lived in the small towns and had different experiences. Some had made attempts to educate their children, and some had practically no opportunity to do so.

All of these people at Carver Park were employees of the BMI plant. This was what Carver Park was all about; it was built specifically for these people. Anyone who worked in the plant was entitled to live in Carver Park if they wanted to. People were never rejected. They were not picky about who lived there. They were happy when people came. They were making every effort to get people to live in the project. The manager or the manager's wife or other people who were employed at Carver Park talked to people. They encouraged them to come and move into the project. I know that the manager became involved in the NAACP in West Las Vegas. He talked to people and told them about the opportunities for coming to live in Carver Park, and about what advantages

were available there. There certainly were many more advantages in Carver Park. For instance, people who lived in West Las Vegas--the new people who came in--had very, very poor housing facilities. Sometimes they lived in little shacks that they put together themselves, and they lived in tents.

Carver Park certainly had much better living opportunities than they had in West Las Vegas. There was even an improvement compared to housing that they'd had in Arkansas or Louisiana, because there was running hot water. Certainly, being new, it was much better than what most people had had before. Space was quite adequate. I lived in Carver Park in a nice two-bedroom place with *all* modern conveniences. Appliances, everything that you would have in an average home, really. Women did laundry in their own homes. I don't remember having had to take laundry any place at all away from the project. Air conditioning, yes. [At the time "air conditioning" was provided by swamp coolers, which were various devices deriving their limited cooling power from the circulation of air over running water.--Ed.]

The space was adequate for family living, because they had two bedrooms and three bedrooms. As far as I know, *only* families lived in the apartments. I don't remember any complaints, except that it was so isolated. What would you have in an area that had been vacant land, and all of a sudden here are these apartments? It's like a little island unto itself. I thought, "How in the world could anybody expect people to come here and live?"

Eventually, the government planted the trees. They put those in later. They kept them watered, but it took a long time. It was dry, and awfully hard to get the things growing and all. I don't think anybody did anything to keep up their yards themselves because

the government, I suppose, owned all the equipment. Nobody had any equipment of any sort. The same people who took care of Victory Village took care of Carver Park.

* * * * *

I think Mr. Williams prided himself on having the opportunity to build this place, so I lived there. [The architect of Carver Park was Paul Revere Williams, a black man from Los Angeles.--Ed.] Mr. Williams spent quite a bit of time at Carver Park. They had this big celebration to dedicate Carver Park. Any time I talked to him, there were several other people in the conversation. We talked generally about the conditions there. It always gets around to talking about race discrimination. He was saying that he was accepted after a number of years. In fact, he designed for some of the more wealthy people who wanted to build outstanding and unusual types of buildings. He got to be really quite famous, particularly for the houses he designed in the Los Angeles area. I thought he was very interesting. I just thought he was a grand person.

I didn't get the impression that Mr. Williams was pleased with Carver Park. It wasn't a creative kind of thing; it was just something that you built for this particular purpose. You didn't really use your creativity doing these things. He didn't have any idea that it would ever turn out to be a residential area. He didn't see Las Vegas as a place where Negro people would actually settle, because he talked about the fact that he wondered what people would do when the plant closed. There was nothing except the Last Frontier Hotel and the El Rancho. Outside of that, there was little to even think about as far as employment for all of these people. Most of them actually

left and went different places after the plant closed in 1944.

Mr. Williams was concerned about what would happen for permanent types of buildings in Las Vegas, where black people could live and establish permanent homes. That's mostly what he was concerned about. He and I talked about a plan for multiple housing and single housing. He liked to build around a patio. He'd build all around and leave inside an area for plants. He built something like that in several homes around Los Angeles.

* * * * *

We organized a Tenants Council at Carver Park. Sometimes I helped out in the office. People had to come into the office, and any time I had an opportunity, I talked to them. I talked to enough people to get the Tenants Council started. Then these people would tell the other people about it. We organized, and we had a president and secretary, et cetera. We had dancing, and we had topics for discussion. People talked about mostly what they had done wherever they had come from. We talked about things we liked and things we didn't like about the situation there. People were most interested in some kind of entertainment, some kind of activity similar to what they had been accustomed to. I had to think of something to do--something that they could participate in--to take the place of what they had done where they had lived before. We discussed different things, and some people talked about what they would like to do. Most of them talked about what they would do when they went back home, and many of them did go back eventually. Then there were a number of people who thought they would like to establish a home some other place.

More than anything else, we talked about what they would like to do for recreation. They wished there was a movie that they could attend. They wanted to have a church. Finally, they did establish a church in the recreation center. When you have any type of social programs you usually get more women, but we had a number of men involved also. We had dancing and music, and some people played cards. I had a piano, and I had someone to play it. I had what we used to call a juke box. That was for the dancing.

The recreation center was the center for all extra activities. We even had a nursery school. I had actually done that kind of work in Chicago. There weren't too many children, however. Most of the wives did not work, because there was nothing for them to do. So most of them did not send their children. We had a few--maybe 15 or 20. At that time people didn't think too much about sending children to school at two, three, four, five years old, because we hadn't gotten into this matter of preparing to enter the public school as we have today. But we had all the facilities; we had everything. We had all the equipment. People generally thought about having a child get some care while they worked. That was the main reason for establishing a preschool program.

I talked with some of the parents. I remember one person who was very, very displeased with me because I mentioned it. "What will my wife do?" he says. "That's what she's supposed to do. She's supposed to take care of those children." He felt that that's a woman's work. That's her job, and why should you try to take her job away from her, which I didn't intend to do. But this is typical of the average man, I think, at least at that time. He worked every day, and he felt that it was the woman's job to take care of the children, and they should not be sent out of the home.

Some of the men were interested, and they thought it might help their children to associate with other children. Many women favored sending their children, but they had never been accustomed to sending very young children out for care. Typical southern families take care of their children. Usually families lived together more than we do nowadays. There was always somebody home to take care of those children--grandma and grandpa and maybe a maiden aunt.

These were children only up to about five. We had programs and we taught the young children basics, and we had all kinds of children's games. I prepared the curriculum, and we followed that. I had had training at Pestalozzi Teachers College in Chicago, and I had organized a preschool in Maywood, Illinois, because there was no kindergarten there at all. We just followed the plans that were made.

I don't remember any outstanding songs and games that the children did that they would have been doing in the South. Some of the games that they had played were the same as I would have had them play. The only thing that I can remember them playing that I had not done was hide-and-go-seek, as they would say. Outside of that, everything was generally children's games that weren't in the lesson planning.

* * * * *

At Tenants Council meetings, residents would sometimes discuss complaints they had about Carver Park or conditions at the plant--especially the men. Discrimination was quite a problem. There was a lot of talk about that, and especially with the union. The person who was most active came up at least once or twice a month from Los Angeles to talk about problems and to try to alleviate

some of these conditions. His name was James Anderson. Mr. Anderson came to our meetings. Sometimes he'd stay up here for a week or more. I had known him before; I had known him in Los Angeles attending NAACP conferences. I think he had a position with the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations]. He was black.

As you would expect, all black workers were put into places where there was more dirt, more filth. Plus, black workers had to go to a certain toilet. They felt that working for the plant, they should work the same as anybody else. Many of the black people organized to fight the practices, and there were a lot of changes.

The men would talk about how they felt about the discrimination. That was general. I think almost everybody felt disappointed, because they didn't expect to find that here. I remember quite well twin brothers, Eslie and Leslie Dobbins. They were *very* active, especially in the plant activities. They were probably the persons who initiated whatever action was taken with regard to these complaints. (I rented a house from them for my mother and father.) There were several men who were very active in talking to other men and getting them to talk about doing something to change their situation, which they finally did. Some of the working conditions were improved in certain departments where the black people worked. According to my conversations with them, there were some changes made in separating people--for instance, toilet facilities.

In October, 1943, 200 black men walked off the job at BMI. I was not in Carver Park when it happened, but naturally I heard about it from Mr. Anderson and other people who lived there. Eslie and Leslie Dobbins were leaders in that activity. They told me about the walkout because of certain patterns of

discrimination that were being practiced. The union was involved; they had made complaints before and nothing was done about it.

I don't know where Eslie and Leslie Dobbins came from. They died in Las Vegas. In fact, one of them was ill and passed away while I was nursing at the hospital, and it wasn't long before the other passed away. They had owned property on the Westside. They bought property even before the plant closed. They had two or three houses. I know that one of the wives is still in West Las Vegas.

* * * * *

Catherine Cook was on the Tenants Council. She was one of our officers, and she was quite active. Blanche Jones was my stepdaughter. [Mrs. Johnson later married a man she had met at Carver Park--Ed.] She wasn't very active on the Tenants Council. She was quite young. Of course, the younger people would find something to do. They'd get together and play some checkers or cards. Elizabeth Lofton was a friend of mine and quite a character. She was from Tallulah, Louisiana. She was one of these people who really tend to everybody's business; a good person, but she wanted to run everything. Her husband was quite a quiet person who didn't bother anybody. I don't know if you've ever met people who set themselves up as being an authority on everything....And yet she had little or no education. She found enough things so that she could tell people what to do. She did this on an individual basis. For instance, she used to tell me, "No, you should do this, and you should do that!" She was everybody's advisor! [laughter] They finally built a lovely brick home over here in West Las Vegas.

I don't remember anyone being outstanding leaders in Carver Park, except this Miss Cook, who was quite active. She got out among the people and told them about things that were happening. She'd say, "Be sure to come out to the Council meeting tonight," and things like that. As far as any *one* outstanding leader, I don't remember anyone.

* * * * *

As a part of the activities for the Tenants Council, I started writing a little Carver Park Newsletter. I tried to write things that I thought would be interesting to the people in the facility, which included writing something about outstanding people. After the dedication of Carver Park, when I met Mr. Williams, we talked quite a bit. It was on my mind to tell the people about this man--who he was and what he had accomplished. Nobody at Carver Park who I had known knew anything about him at all.

I got a little story together about what he had accomplished--about his education and about his experiences being discouraged from studying architecture, and about some of the buildings that he had designed in Los Angeles. I also wrote about teachers and counselors discouraging him from pursuing architecture to the extent that he was very unhappy. He overcame these negative attitudes and ideas that people had tried to get him to understand. They had tried to convince him to take up certain subjects so that he would be more likely to get employment. I just thought *nothing* about writing the article! [laughs]

Mr. Morris, the assistant manager at Carver Park, came and said that he was a little bit worried, because he thought I shouldn't have written anything. I never could understand why I shouldn't have. Perhaps somebody thought that maybe I would do

this kind of thing, because they knew that there was some unrest. This unrest mostly came from the discriminatory practices in the plant itself. For instance, there were separate toilets and that sort of thing.

At that time Archie Grant was head of the Housing Authority of Clark County. He was very aware of every single thing that happened. Someone brought these things to his attention, probably because he expected them to do so, or they may have been instructed to do so. Mr. Grant was the wheel for BMI.

Archie Grant didn't talk to me about the article. I found out that he was upset from the assistant manager, Mr. Morris. I was just told that I'd better be careful; I'd better not write anything that was going to stir the people up. Apparently, Mr. Morris was told to tell me that I should not write this kind of thing, because Mr. Grant was very much displeased about the article. I got the understanding that I wasn't very popular with the power structure.

Once I had a telephone conversation with one of the ladies who worked in Mr. Grant's office. She called me "Lubertha," so I called her by her first name. (I had done interviewing for the Urban League in Chicago, and we recognized everyone there by their last names. Nobody ever said "Lubertha." That was their custom.) There was quite a little stir about that! [laughs] I felt that we were more or less on the same level, as far as I was concerned. So, I understood that I was not quite so popular. There is a fear on the part of a lot of people that somebody is always going to stir up something. Mr. Grant was known by the residents at Carver Park. He was out there; it was part of his job. Some people who worked around there may have known him, but I never heard anybody discuss him in any way. I'm sure that there was not any sort of close relationship.

Sometime later I talked to Mr. Grant—not about anything at Carver Park. I was trying to find a place; I wanted to buy some property. I wanted to buy a home, because I knew that I was eventually going to have my parents here, because of the climate. He wasn't exactly hostile, but he certainly wasn't helpful. I realized that he certainly was not interested in my finding a place to stay. I asked him because I had talked to several real estate people, and they had told me that I couldn't buy anywhere except on the Westside. I didn't want to live on the Westside because the conveniences were not suitable. My father was quite ill. We had to bathe him at the time. You can see how it would have been without even a wash bowl or a toilet. I think that's the only time I ever really talked to Mr. Grant.

From the small types of conversations in which he had been involved, I got the feeling that Mr. Grant had something like the old Southern idea about black people: they should be controlled. In other words, they shouldn't expect to get too high. They should expect to stay in their place. You've heard that expression?

* * * * *

Carver Park was more desolate than the Westside. On the Westside at least there were churches, and there were some activities. The NAACP was there. A number of Mexican people had settled there. Mexicans had businesses; they had stores.

The social life of West Las Vegas may have kept a lot of blacks from moving to Carver Park. If you go into a new town or city, you sort of dig in. You get yourself situated. Then, for somebody to come along and say, "Now, there's a beautiful new place out there, and you should go out there and live," well.... Many people were unhappy about the housing

situation, because, although they had been accustomed to discrimination, they realized that they had been the last people to have any housing built. When they came here, they found *nothing*. There was no place for them to live.

Later I had my parents here; I brought my parents up from Pasadena. I tried to get a place for them to live. The only place I could find was an old house that Mexican people had lived in. There was water, but no way to get hot water. Some houses had running water, but the toilets were used by two or three families. They were outhouses. Later, in 1949, I worked on a survey for the federal government, when they built the first low-cost housing here. Many of the facilities, like water and the sewers, were not even usable. We found that there were a lot of pipes that were dry. That was quite a problem. Some of these people had lived in fairly nice homes. Not all of them had lived in plain, old cabins. Some of the people were quite intelligent. They were not *all* illiterate. Most of them were the disadvantaged people, who had not had the best of things in the South and came here to better themselves, but there were a number of people, especially younger people, who came and who had had some training and some education.

* * * * *

Just before I left Carver Park, there was a minister who came out and started talking to the people about organizing a church. That caused a few problems, because it meant that the church would use the recreation facility. Some people would be interested in church, and some were not. After I left, I believe the church won out completely, because for the most part, they were very religious people.

Reverend Lester Cruise was pastor of the Church of Christ Holiness on the Westside.

He was quite active in the union. He had an unusual position (I don't know what it was called), but it seemed that he had a lot of influence over a lot of the men. Whatever position he had gave him an opportunity to get together with the men and talk to them about situations, problems. [Lester Cruise was the foreman of the plant labor pool.--Ed.] He finally left Carver Park, went to Los Angeles, where he had a church, and a few years later came back to Las Vegas. He married a young woman, and she had one child. That child is now one of my teachers. [At the time of this oral history, Mrs. Johnson was in an emeritus position at a child care center called Operation Independence.--Ed.] His wife teaches in the public school system here. He died a few years ago. He was more interested in the plant than Carver Park. I never talked to him about it. I had just met him years ago when I was working here.

Reverend Simmons was an interesting person. He came from Tallulah, Louisiana, and pastored here for quite a while. He died here about 10 years ago. He moved over to Las Vegas and pastored. He was typical of the southern minister who thinks that certain activities are irreligious; that you should just have the church. He believed that it was sinful to do some of the things that people wanted to do to have fun. Dancing happened to be one of these things. I never heard anybody say he had anything to say specifically about dancing. He just thought that the recreation facility shouldn't be used for the type of activities that we held for fun, for pleasure. He thought it should be used for religion, period! But that's typical of the average Baptist minister, especially.

He also got a job as head of maintenance at the hospital in Las Vegas. He worked in the same hospital where I later worked. He worked there until he passed away. Reverend

Simmons was quite prominent there at BMI. He participated in politics--voting and participating in elections for office in the Democratic party. He was respected in Carver Park. He was a leader, especially with the more religious people. I didn't know him well at Carver Park, but I got to know him better after he moved into the city and bought a home.

I attended the Methodist church under Reverend Cook. His church was in West Las Vegas, where he lived. I met Reverend Cook as the president of NAACP. I wasn't too concerned about what type of church I attended. As a child I really went to the Methodist church a lot more than I ever went to the Baptist church, because my grandmother lived close to the Methodist church, and I spent a *lot* of time at my grandmother's home. My parents lived quite a distance from there, and they attended the Baptist church. So I have always had this leaning toward the Methodists. It never was one of these things where I'm a *Baptist*, or I'm a *Methodist*. This just never meant anything to me.

Reverend Stevens, I believe, was the next pastor of the Methodist church after Reverend Cook. I had met Reverend Stevens in Los Angeles. He was a young minister who finally came to Las Vegas and pastored here for quite some time. Reverend Stevens was finally elected president of NAACP. Reverend Cook just went to another church, not in Las Vegas. Reverend Bennett came much later. He came to pastor the same church after Reverend Stevens. He's still pastoring there.

Reverend Cook had a different background than Reverend Simmons, but it would be difficult to explain what the difference was. I don't think Reverend Cook was raised in the South. He was in many ways different--had different attitudes. For instance, he was

interested in making changes in the patterns of discrimination, and he was elected president of the NAACP because of his concern.

Reverend Simmons was interested in making changes, but perhaps in a different manner. He thought of it as a movement that should really be led by ministers for the most part. I never felt that he was really concerned too much with the NAACP movement, for instance.

At the time I was there, there wasn't any competition between the ministers or the various religious groups at Carver Park. I heard about some competition or something like that later. Reverend Simmons moved away, I suppose, rather than being involved out there. He preached at Carver Park for a while, but very soon he organized a church in West Las Vegas. I never talked to him; I think he sort of considered me not quite as sympathetic or interested as I might have been in his establishing a church, because, naturally, that was a threat to *my* activities.

If they had taken over the recreation facility altogether, then my activities would have had to be changed to some extent. There was a little bit of rivalry there, not that we ever said anything. But I know it was there, because some of the people were saying, "Well, we should use that facility for a church instead of all these sinful things that you're doing." [laughs] Mostly dancing was sinful. That's always so in most churches. I won't say in most churches any more, but at least it was in the Baptist church. Very few people said anything to me. I know that there were a few... for instance, my friend Elizabeth Lofton didn't like having some of the activities. I had a juke box, and they would say that juke box sang the devil's something or other. Nobody ever tried to stop me, but remarks were made. That would have been true anywhere. It is just that a lot of religious people are *definitely* against

dancing. After I left Carver Park, I heard more about it than I did when I was there. I heard that some people were glad when they had an opportunity to worship in there instead of having some of the other things.

* * * * *

There was a store over in Victory Village. It was right across the road from Carver Park. That's the only place people had to buy their food. I had some friends who had a store at Carver Park after I left. They lived in West Las Vegas, but they had this store out there. They live over in West Las Vegas now. It was just groceries and soft drinks and things of that sort.... No bars were allowed in Carver Park. McCants was one of the names. The McCants who ran the store at Carver Park was not from the same family as Arthur McCants, the first President of the NAACP in Las Vegas. I never heard any complaints about anything. A lot of people had cars, and they'd go into Las Vegas to shop. I shopped in Las Vegas.

My expectations concerning race relations in Las Vegas were based on what I had read about the West--that a man is a man and all that. And I thought, "That's going to be perfect out there." Was I ever shocked! When we drove out from Carver Park over to town, there were signs along the highway on the business places. If you went into one of the business places, they had a big sign up on the wall that said, "We do not cater to colored," letting you know that they didn't even want your business. You couldn't eat in a hot dog stand; you couldn't eat *anywhere*.

Other than shopping at Victory Village, there were no relations between Victory Village residents and Carver Park people. There was no reason to. They had nothing in common. They didn't have the same churches. All they did was go over there and

shop. Later on, I think they did establish some other entertainment, like movies. You see, when I went to Carver Park, it was just opening. They had *just* finished the building. After a year or so, there were a few other things. I know there were movies, and they built a hospital. It was a Catholic hospital. The wards were not segregated, but over in Las Vegas there was complete segregation in the hospital.

There were no racial tensions between Carver Park and Victory Village that I know of, because the only place they had contact was in the store or at the plant. Otherwise there was nothing at all where they had anything in common.

I don't think there was any concern at all about neighborhood safety or being imposed upon in any criminal manner. I don't think there was any idea that anything like that would occur. I'm sure they felt as I did--that there would not be any incidents where anyone would be taken advantage of. Remember, these people were new, too. They didn't have any roots here. They were all people who had just come from some other place, for the most part. The houses were built for war workers, period. We didn't have any security system that I know about. There were a couple of people who lived out there who were policemen over in Las Vegas on the Westside.

* * * * *

There were no advantages that I can think of to being a separate black community, because we have always been sensitive to discrimination, even in the South, although there was very little that we could do about it. Generally speaking, most black people everywhere are concerned and sensitive about being forced to live in some community

because of their color. We've always felt that it was unfair, and so it was not appreciated. There were *many* people who understood why they were the last people to get a decent place to live, because housing was prepared for everyone else first and the black people last. We're very sensitive people; there are reasons why we are. I notice doctors and other people in the medical profession are always wondering why black people suffer more from hypertension. Why wouldn't we suffer more? All of my life I've suffered from hypertension *because* of this.

In a way, Carver Park was a community, but the togetherness, so to speak, was more or less an artificial thing. It was an arrangement that was only made for the benefit of some type of organization or activity that *needed* these people, and they were not considered permanent citizens. It's like if you wanted to build any other community...you needed bodies, you needed people, but you thought of them as being there for that purpose with no plan or any reason at all to think of them as being people who were planning ahead. And you were aware of the fact that this was probably a temporary situation. I did not think of it as a *real* community that we could plan for, say, 20 years ahead.

There was quite a turnover, because people would hear of other areas. Often people would visit from another similar settlement for war work. Somebody would say, "Oh, it's better there." There were other war plants in other cities, other towns, even in Nevada. Some people left Carver Park to go there, thinking that might be better. Some people left and went to Los Angeles.

A *lot* of people went up to Hawthorne, Nevada. [Hawthorne was the site of a U.S. Navy ammunition depot.--Ed.] I was not aware at the time of why they went to Hawthorne, but I know that after I had lived

here for a while I met a lot of people who moved from Las Vegas to Hawthorne. They set up a community there. I remember they even had an NAACP organization. They were conscious of the discrimination there and tried to do something about it even in Hawthorne.

* * * * *

Carver Park just didn't fill up. People just didn't move into it. The people who had moved into West Las Vegas, many of them, just didn't leave; they stayed over in West Las Vegas. They built this dormitory for single men because there were a number of men who came and left their families back in the South. I don't think they ever had over seven people in the dormitory. There was another place called Anderson's Camp. Perhaps even before Carver Park was built, a lot of the single men lived there. I never went there myself, but I knew a lot of the men lived there. Now, what ratio it was--white and black—I do not know.

The only people who worried about blacks not moving into Carver Park in large numbers were the people who had jobs there, like the manager and the assistant manager and office personnel. I think Mr. Barnett left Carver Park because he was disappointed in the fact that the place was not fully occupied, maybe just a third of it. He went back to his old job in Los Angeles. His assistant, Joseph Morris, took over. He was black, also. I don't think he had any real concern or dedication. It was just a job.

At one point blacks in Carver Park had to move. There were so many vacancies there, and yet there were so many white people who needed a place to live. For a while, they were keeping Carver Park absolutely confined to black people. But with all these apartments

vacant, they felt that something should be done with them, so they moved the black families to the back of the project and let white people come in. The black families didn't like it one bit, of course. They did protest. What their protest amounted to, I do not know, because I was not here then.

I had some friends who had moved to Carver Park from Los Angeles. They were quite outspoken, because they were intelligent people. They had lived in Los Angeles, but they had come to Las Vegas because opportunities were better here for work than they were in Los Angeles. I knew two sisters who had actually lived with us in Pasadena at one time, and they just refused to move. They just wouldn't move. The management was quite displeased with them. It wasn't too long before they moved back to Los Angeles. People in Los Angeles were pretty sophisticated. They knew what they could do and what they couldn't, while maybe a lot of other people who came from other areas were accustomed to being pushed around.

* * * * *

During the First World War, I had some relatives who felt that they shouldn't have to fight in a white man's war. Many black workers at BMI were expressing similar attitudes about the Second World War. All of the young men with whom I came in contact were saying, "I'm not going. I'm not going." Most of them did go eventually, but they resented it very much and tried to find ways to get out of going. That was the common thing. They saw it as a white man's war only in this way: that if they did not have equal privileges, equal treatment, they wondered why they should have to go and fight to save a country. One of the most interesting speeches I ever heard was made by a young man at

an NAACP convention in Los Angeles-- apparently a very well-educated young man. One of the statements that he made was, "And now tomorrow I shall go to fight a war for freedom, which I have never had."

I didn't hear much about black workers in the BMI plant being bothered that they were working in a military production plant, however. It was a voluntary thing, you see. They came looking for work and looking for better opportunities--an opportunity to earn more money. It wasn't like somebody forcing you to go, as they were forced to go fight in the war. The Tenants Council never tried to take action as a group to do anything about conditions at the plant.

* * * * *

When Nellis Air Force Base was being built, lots of black soldiers came into the area. Of course, some of the soldiers used to come over to Carver Park, and I chaperoned some girls out there to meet the soldiers.

There was what they called a riot in August of 1943. It happened in West Las Vegas. I knew about it after the fact. I don't really know what actually happened. There was a lot of talk and discussion about it. Mainly, it involved the black soldiers. That wasn't anything unusual. North Las Vegas was apparently very anti-black. There was always some sort of a problem there...signs of resentment. People had to come through North Las Vegas to get to West Las Vegas.

Rumors about black soldiers coming from the base to the Westside and taking the girls from the black men over there were, as far as I know, without foundation. There weren't that many girls over there, to tell the truth. Later on there might have been, but I know when I was here, there weren't enough girls over there for anybody to worry about! [laughs]

With so few families, how many girls are you going to have to be taken over by the soldiers? Sometimes these things sort of build up into some kind of thing that never even happened, except on an individual basis, maybe of two or three cases. This I don't know about.

I was here when the black United Service Organizations (USO) was founded. I went over there several times. In fact, we used to have our NAACP meetings there. I met most of the people who lived over there who were active, like Mr. McCants and his family and the Reverend Cook and other people who were interested.

The NAACP here was established because of work opportunities at the Boulder Dam. There was a big problem about not employing blacks there. Mr. McCants was responsible for getting someone from the NAACP to come out here to try to do something about that situation, which they did. Mr. McCants was occasionally referred to as a troublemaker. I'm sure you must have realized by now that any black who takes any kind of action *against* discrimination, segregation is a troublemaker. He's called crazy if he refuses to put up with things and *fight* against anything that is anti-black. He's *always* called a troublemaker. Mr. McCants was quite concerned; I don't know where he came from, but he had lived in Las Vegas for a long time.

Naturally, he was interested in the fact that black people were not allowed to work on the dam. Many of them came here from other places. They thought surely they could get work on a government job. When they were refused jobs, he was interested and wanted to do something about it, tried to, and was successful. He was this kind of person. He had no feeling of inferiority to anybody. For instance, he used to go up to the judges and mayor or whoever and ask them for a membership, and he usually got

it--a membership in NAACP. So he was a troublemaker, you see.

In the earlier years it seems that there was not much discrimination in the hotels, the gambling establishments, because there were so few blacks. That *never* happens until you get a larger number of black people. If you've only got, say, 25 or 30 black people in a town, there's no problem. It was when the war workers started coming in that the discrimination and segregation got to be just rampant. It's because people seem to think, "Now this is going to become a Negro town, a black town." There's something that causes this situation most everywhere, even back east where black people had not settled before. For instance, during the First World War in Chicago, a lot of black people came in because of the steel strikes. This caused a lot of resentment and problems. But the blacks were drafted more or less. They wanted somebody to do the work. The people who were running the mills didn't care what color they were. They didn't want to lose their business, so they just got anybody they could to come in to take the places of the strikers. They wanted to break the strike, and that's how they did it.

* * * * *

Carver Park was just a job as far as I was concerned. I was only there nine or ten months. I don't think blacks had any definite plans, most of them. I think they thought of this as someplace where they would come to work and had no idea what their future might be. They didn't know anything about the town. I don't think they had any understanding of whether BMI was a war plant that would close when the war was over. People were just looking for a place where they could earn some more money and

have a better life because of that. They had no conception of what the situation might be in the future.

After the war a lot of people wanted to stay. They were going to move over into West Las Vegas, but there was hardly any opportunity to secure housing, and black people could not get loans. This is what discouraged a lot of people from staying. The power structure said that the people didn't need to have any loans, because they were all going back to the South. I think this was something that they hoped would happen.

* * * * *

By the summer of 1944 Las Vegas had lost some of its appeal for me. I did not think that the city held much promise for blacks, largely due to the poor housing that was available. My immediate personal prospects were dim: because of the small number of blacks at Carver Park, I suspected that my job as recreation director was in jeopardy. Also, although I was to supervise a men's dorm that had been built near Carver Park, so few men moved in that it was unlikely that anything would come of it. I looked for a job in California, and wound up working for the Urban League at the Palm Lane housing project outside of Los Angeles.

My father's health remained poor. In order to get him to a more congenial climate, I moved my parents to Las Vegas in late 1944. I continued to live and work in Los Angeles, but I wanted to get a house for my parents in Las Vegas. The first thing I found, by going around to the real estate people, was that I could not *buy* a house outside of West Las Vegas. Nobody would sell me a house, so I rented a house for my parents. I wanted to know if they would be able to have a toilet and running water. The landlords said yes. I

waited and waited, and finally I said, "Well, I better go up there to Las Vegas and see what's going on."

When I got up there, my father was *quite* ill, and there was no toilet except a place outside that about three or four other families were using. It was one of those outdoor things. They stayed there for a short time, but I had to get my father away from there. He couldn't stand that; he was still quite ill. I had no idea what I would do. Before I left California the first time, I had taken the civil service examination because I'd had some experience as an interviewer with the Urban League. I came to Las Vegas hoping that I might be able to get work in the federal employment service. But the person who interviewed me had no qualms at all--he just said to me, "We do not hire Negroes in this department. But," he said, "you can go over to the..." (whatever they called it--office for domestic workers) and he said, "I'm sure you can get work." That was quite a thing then. Maids were being hired in the hotels quite a bit. I knew that this was their policy. I wasn't at all surprised.

I decided that I would become a big rancher. What did I know about what is required? I lived on a ranch out on Boulder Highway. I had married in 1945, and while I was in Los Angeles, my husband had found this place. They just wanted someone to take care of the place, so we lived out there until we bought property in Paradise Valley. I bought this 25-acre ranch in about 1945.

I had gone around everywhere that I could find anybody who talked about selling, and they told me that I couldn't buy. My husband and I were driving around one day just to look over the country, and I saw this sign saying, "For Sale." The owner said, "Well, the first person who brings the money gets the property." I paid half of the price down.

Then it was only \$2,200 down. The land was in Paradise Valley facing Sunset Road, just about a block from Eastern Avenue. It was nice--beautiful, really lovely. We had some beautiful shade trees--so many huge shade trees. There was a little house, and they didn't charge us anything for the house. It was called the Millwarden ranch, using my previous name and my husband's name. I've always had great ambitions. [laughs] I haven't done too much with them, but I've been involved in them.

The man who sold me the property thought I would have problems, but I really did not. Black people did not live in Paradise Valley at that time. He said he would sell me the property, but he couldn't guarantee me that I wouldn't have problems. I never had any. The only indication I ever had of any problem was when somebody called me. I put an ad in the paper at one time when I had a vacant apartment [Mrs. Johnson had rental units on the Paradise Valley property.--Ed.] I said something like, "No race preference." A man called me up and wanted to know what kind of person this was advertising for people of all races. Otherwise, it never bothered me. It just shows you the attitude.... By that time, of course, it was different from when we lived in Carver Park, because we had a state law prohibiting discrimination in housing.

* * * * *

All I knew about ranching was what I'd seen in the movies. But I had 25 acres of land and I thought I'll just do whatever is necessary, with no idea what was required. [laughs] The first thing we did was to buy a cow over at the big ranch owned by either Lum or Abner of radio fame. I never saw such a wonderful cow in my life. We had raised cows in the country in the South. Before I

bought this cow, I had bought some pigs, and I ordered chickens, and I had rabbits and ducks. We had a huge pond out there at the time. I worked at it for a couple of years, but it was just too much. I failed to get the funds that I needed. I had a couple of promises, but the things didn't work out otherwise. My father was ill at the time. My mother helped, but it was too much for us.

We did not have to live off what the ranch produced. My husband was working. He had a job as foreman of the theaters. He used to hire all the men and take care of the movie theaters. He worked for Tom Oakey. Oakey built the Huntridge theater. I think it was unusual to have a black man in that kind of job.

* * * * *

I built a duplex on the Paradise Valley property because I had planned to develop a sort of dude ranch. I never finished my project. I had three different buildings plus my own house. I had one duplex to rent, and then the others were single apartments. I wanted a large place. I was trying to get financing; that was a big problem. I talked to a lot of people in Los Angeles and different places about getting finances, but at that time nobody thought anything would ever happen in Las Vegas. They said, "You'll lose money. That place will never amount to anything." [laughs]

At that time black people had no place to go in Las Vegas at all. I was going to prepare a place where I had swimming pools. I planned to get entertainment. I planned to get everything that one would have on a ranch of that sort. There were some in Reno. There were all these dude ranches around, and I was going to do the same thing that the other people were doing.

I bought a barracks building. I fixed it up and built a barbecue stand outside and bought a juke box. I put in seats and everything. I got a beer license, and I had a lot of people out there for two or three years just to buy the beer and eat the chicken. My dad built me a *huge* barbecue pit that I could even put a half of a cow on. So I had barbecued beef, barbecued chicken. I prepared the food. Occasionally I hired someone, but I did most of it myself. I'd say I had 40 or 50 people, but people would come and go. It was nightly; I was open every night.

People came from West Las Vegas. Then we used to have NAACP picnics out there, and the Westside churches had picnics. We did have some meetings there where we invited the candidates to come and speak, but generally, they were NAACP picnics. We did sometimes take advantage of the fact that we felt that we could get some of the politicians out and get them to express themselves in the way that we hoped they would. This was about the only place people had to go.

After I decided I couldn't make it with a ranch, I did a little substitute teaching on the Westside, but it was very difficult, because it was seven miles from town, and there were no telephones. [laughs] I would have overalls on and my boots. By the time I got ready to go to school, they didn't need me any more. Some funds from the government somehow provided training for practical nurses, so I took that course. I took it because we had to be licensed by the state. I worked at Southern Nevada Hospital for seven years, and I just gradually gave up the ranching.

LIFE ON THE WESTSIDE, 1940S-1950S

Apparently, in the earlier years before the war, the blacks who came to Las Vegas settled downtown. [The area referred to here is Block 17. Other blacks lived in an area bounded by First, Fifth, Ogden, and Stewart.-Ed.] I think that subsequent changes in the neighborhood came about, at least partially, due to the fact that black people wanted to run businesses. They wanted to set up clubs and have gambling just like everybody else. During the war there were a lot of people with money to spend. Some type of agreement --I don't know what the details were--was made with the power structure that blacks would move to the Westside if they wanted to start their businesses. They would start it on the Westside, but they could not start it downtown. I'm sure it wasn't explained that way, but that's what it amounted to. So, many of these people did move over to the Westside and set up their own clubs. It had nothing to do with whites wanting business on the Westside, because they didn't care about it. They never showed any interest in having

black business. Their only concern was to get blacks away from the uptown area.

Some blacks owned clubs uptown in the Fremont Street area before they moved to the Westside. You'd come across some names like Boysie Ensley. He was the first friend, as far as I can remember, who had a club uptown, and he moved over to the Westside.

I knew the Ensleys *very* well. They were average people; however, they seemed to have a lot of know-how, as far as business was concerned. I went to his club to be served when it was uptown. It was not racially mixed. It was black, period! [laughs] He had a restaurant and then gambling. I heard from him the story about his business having to move. There were other people who kept their homes in the uptown area for many years. Some of them refused to move; they just stayed there. If they were not interested in running a business, apparently there was not much pressure.

Even when I first came to Las Vegas, there were black clubs on the Westside.

There were several very nice clubs at one time. They were more or less like the small clubs owned by white people. It was quite a flourishing community at that time. The Brown Derby was the most famous club. I thought I'd never forget the name of the man who owned it for so many years. I went there two or three times, but it was not my choice. I knew nothing about gambling and never was interested. They were all gambling clubs. You still can't make money in Las Vegas unless you have gambling! [laughs] The Harlem Club is one of the older clubs, also. I don't remember the owners' names. I never saw these people too much or went around the clubs too much. I went occasionally.

The bars and clubs on the Westside were *always* mixed. There's less mixing now than there was before, but they're still mixed. The white people always went. In fact, someone has said that that's why the Moulin Rouge closed--because the powers on the other side of town did not like the fact that so many white people went there that you couldn't tell who was who. I certainly went in. I was invited to go to the Moulin Rouge on the night they opened. We were guests of the hotel. There were probably more white people there than black, because they had this *good* entertainment. The owners were white; they wanted the club for money. That was the deal. [The Moulin Rouge was built by Will Max Schwartz and several partners, including Louis Ruben and Alexander Bismo. It opened in 1955, and in 1957 was purchased and reopened by Leo Fry, owner of the Leroy Corporation.--Ed.]

At that time, black people were not being served in any of the hotels. Several white people got the idea to build on the Westside. There were three hotels actually built for that purpose, all by white people, but none of them stayed open long enough to

make money. I never knew exactly why the Moulin Rouge closed, but there were all kinds of rumors. Some people said it amounted to a lot more than financial problems; that there were some objections to the fact that it was racially mixed. The former heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis was brought in. They were pretending that the hotel belonged to Joe Louis. The black people knew it didn't, [laughs] because they knew he didn't have enough money left! He stayed there for a couple of years or maybe more.

The Moulin Rouge is really in West Las Vegas, but apparently the owner had a very strong attitude against black people. It was stated that he charged more to black people for drinks than he did white people. That's what one picket was about, I know. [The controversy Mrs. Johnson refers to occurred in 1960 when the Moulin Rouge was owned by Leo Fry of the Leroy Corporation.--Ed.] Frankly, I don't remember if he had any black employees. He may have, but I don't remember he did. Most of the employees were black at the time the hotel was opened.

* * * * *

There were a few whites on the Westside. I never heard of any serious problems until later on. They seemed to involve the soldiers more than anything. Otherwise, apparently they lived peacefully there.

Chet Gilbert's store was on Bonanza Road, and black people traded there quite a bit. I knew him as well as you could know anybody like that. I used to buy from him quite a bit. Apparently he did get along with blacks. I used to come all the way from Paradise Valley over there to buy. There were no grocery stores in Paradise Valley. That's seven miles to Fremont Street from where I lived. I suppose I shopped there because

so many other black people shopped there. There was Safeway and two or three others, but there weren't that many stores downtown, for that matter!

I believe there were more black-owned businesses than those owned by whites on the Westside in the 1940s. Andy Bruno, a black man, came here perhaps in the 1960s, and he became very active politically, although, as far as I know, he never ran for office or anything like that. He did have a liquor store on the corner of D and Jackson; the store is still there. He passed away and his wife's still alive.

I did talk with this man who built the Flamingo Hotel--Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel. He was a friend to Mr. Bruno. (I don't know about him being his friend, but when I mentioned the fact that Mr. Bruno was active politically, that included being somehow connected with Bugsy Siegel.) In fact, Bugsy Siegel owed me some money, which I never got back! [laughs] Mr. Bruno put on a picnic out at my place once; we used to have picnics out there quite a lot. Evidently, Bugsy Siegel was out of town at that time. Mr. Bruno said that he could get some money from me to put on the picnic, and then Mr. Siegel was going to pay me back or pay Mr. Bruno, which he never did. It was not long after that before Bugsy Siegel was killed. I didn't have any dealing personally with him at all, except I saw him on occasion in connection with Mr. Bruno. I didn't understand what was going on at all, you know: I didn't know anything about him being a gangster until after he was killed.

Mrs. Johnson [referring to the first wife of Lubertha Johnson's second husband, Roland Johnson] started a store during the war. Roland Johnson was a carpenter, and he built a store up on D Street. The Community Store, 1218 North D Street, is still one of the largest stores. It was a grocery store; they sold

specialty meats. His wife passed away and I married him in 1961. We ran the store, and I worked in the store quite a bit. Mr. Johnson did some carpenter work, but it was usually for private individuals.

* * * * *

In the 1940s and 1950s black policemen worked on the Westside, but they were not allowed to arrest a white person. If I did something [laughs] they might have me arrested and put me in jail. The authorities only got them to manage the black people, you see. They'd work on the Westside, period. No other place.

* * * * *

About the time I came, a Baptist church was being built on the Westside. It's still there. Churches were *very* important, because this is something that southern people really relate to. The church was often the only place in the community where people gathered, had their programs. Then the church took a very strong role in fighting discrimination, even in the South. That was not so true in Las Vegas as in some other places. I think that was because the people were new and coming from all areas. They didn't relate to each other to a great extent until the later years. I think that's why they didn't take an active role.

Churches were able to help families in need to some extent, and the Catholic service was quite helpful. There was a big organization. I had problems at Carver Park--like quite often husbands would be sent to the army, and their families would have to find a way to get back home. The Catholic people were established here, and they were very helpful. They still are helpful to people in need, no matter what their color.

If black people were in trouble or there was a crisis, there were few places to turn to in the city or county except for the Catholic organization. Early, there was some type of organization. In fact, I was a member of the Welfare Board at one time years ago, but it was very weak. There was very little support.

I thought one of the things they used to do was kind of queer. If somebody wanted help, they...(I don't know what to call these people--I'm not saying the power structure) would provide train fare or bus fare and get them out of town. That was a very popular thing to do. I think they were more or less people who were involved in the gambling. I did hear about many people who were given bus fare, because they were not supposed to be here. I don't know that this was an organized effort. That was something to do with the city fathers, it would seem...this money was available.

* * * * *

When blacks would appear before the city commission in the late 1940s and early 1950s asking for things like street paving and basic services, they would be told there wasn't enough assessed valuation on the Westside. That was always the excuse, and probably it was true that the assessments were low. What else would you expect? These were people who, if they worked, had the lowest possible salaries. They could not afford to pay the kind of money that the people in the other areas of the city could pay. This is true. However, some of these areas were dangerous, the way the water used to settle down in the streets, and the way the people would walk the streets when it rained. Certainly these conditions could have been improved if anybody had wanted to do it.

There was a problem with fire protection on the Westside because many of the buildings were below standard. They had no proper fire facilities in many cases. You take somebody who has finally managed to build a shack for himself and his family.... (I remember one lady, a friend of mine. She was a very intelligent person. She always said, "The first two years I lived in Las Vegas, I *never* could stretch my feet out.") They did live in tiny, little shacks and some in tents. How could you expect to get money from people who couldn't even afford to have a house? I think I mentioned that nobody could get a loan in West Las Vegas. Who had cash enough to build a proper home? Some people did. Some people managed it.

I did a Westside housing survey for the city of Las Vegas in 1949. Franklin Roosevelt had been much concerned about housing for poor people. All over the country people were making a study of this situation. As usual, the black people were occupying the poorest housing. Las Vegas was selected as one of the areas for at least considering improving housing conditions for black people. The housing authority here was selected to do an in-depth study to see what the picture was. That's how this came about. A lot of people knew that I had worked in housing--I had worked here and in California. I guess that's how I happened to be selected to do this sort of thing. I wasn't working at the time, and someone recommended that I go to the office. Mr. Herbert Gerson was executive director of the housing authority of the city of Las Vegas at that time, and he hired me. I don't know where he got his information about me.

We had conferences with the representatives from Washington, and we discussed how to do it. A budget was set up, and I had about seven people to work with

me. It was really an interesting experience. I didn't have any idea conditions were what they were. I wasn't aware that there were *very* few homes with even a toilet or running water in the kitchen. There were some pipes that had been put into certain areas to certain homes, and there was no longer any water in them. They were just there. Not everybody had electricity. Most people did have lights, and they had all kinds of heat, like kerosene burners. A few people had pretty nice homes with running water and electric heat. There was no gas heat, I don't believe, at all in this area. They just put it down this street here about three years ago.

There were as many people as could possibly live in a given house, mostly because it was so difficult to secure a house. People in this area could not get a loan. They had to make out with whatever they could get. A lot of shacks were built out of lumber that was left over from not only the Basic Magnesium plant, but also the Nellis Air Base. Some people were still living in tents.

We had forms that we had to fill out. "Is there a toilet; is there running water?" All the questions were already prepared. I didn't always go; I went most of the time. I was in the office; I had to make the final reports. I covered an area, and then I could make up a report. I just handed the reports in to the housing authority here, and a final report was produced in 1950. [*Housing Survey of Selected Areas...as of April, 1950*. Compiled by the Housing Authority of the city of Las Vegas.]

Following that survey, houses were actually built within the next few years or so. The federally-funded Marble Manor development was right here on Washington Street, and it's a very nice place. It opened about 1952. At one time it was supposed to have been the best kept low-cost housing in

the country, and it still looks very nice. There have been many other housing projects since that time.

* * * * *

When I came back to Las Vegas in 1945, there were a number of hotels being established on the Strip. Blacks were able to find employment as maids and janitors. That was all over the United States. Some of the people here said, "You know, the white people won't like it if we have too many blacks working, even in cleaning up and all." They were talking about the southerners. I said, "That's what they've been accustomed to all of their lives." There were no problems as far as getting janitor jobs and maid jobs.

The Mexicans at that time were just about in the same position as blacks. They didn't get into the hotels much for any other kind of work. They did the railroad jobs and things like that. Later on they were accepted, certainly before the blacks were.

Social relations between blacks and Mexicans were *fairly* good, but I always had a feeling (and I still have) that the Mexican people were a bit concerned that they might be put into the same category as black people. Even on the Human Relations Commission we had, there were Mexicans and blacks, but they never wanted to go in with us, although they used all of the tactics that we had used, and they still do. They've done better with it than we have, because they are still more acceptable than we are. I'm amused to hear them singing, "We Shall Overcome." They have used many of the methods that we have used to gain a better position in society. You can't blame them for that. This might have been a part of the reason for them moving out of West Las Vegas. I don't know that there are

any Mexican people living in West Las Vegas any more. It happened over a period of years; it didn't happen immediately.

I was not aware of any sense that there would be competition for jobs between the Mexicans and blacks...any tension in that area. I never had any knowledge of where this matter came up, because I never went looking for jobs very often. I do know that finally the Mexican people did get jobs in the hotels, and we also made the fight with the hotels for jobs. And we got quite a few jobs through group pressure.

PERVASIVE DISCRIMINATION, 1940S-1950S

Before the 1960s, access to entertainment and amusement was restricted in Las Vegas. Blacks were not allowed in public swimming pools. We couldn't even gamble. Theaters--you could go into the theater if you would sit on the side. In the main part of the theater they had seats over by the wall, where you sat. The El Portal was the worst of all. One time three or four of us went in, like Woodrow Wilson and a few others, and we wouldn't sit on the side; we sat in the center. They called the police to have us put out. We went outside and talked to the police. We finally left. I didn't really think they would do anything to us, which they didn't. We just got thrown out of everywhere. We made it a practice to go into different places.

Surprisingly, for the past 20 years I've had insurance with Cragin and Pike. They owned the El Portal Theater as well as an insurance agency. We used to have some fights with Ernie Cragin about his policies. I think he was most difficult as far as we were concerned, because if you insisted on *not* sitting against the wall, the police were

called. All the theaters were segregated, but it seems that others didn't make the effort to see that this policy was carried out like Mr. Cragin did. He was just anti-Negro, period. I do know that the man who owned one of the other theaters said that he was told when he first came here that he dare not admit black people. He had come from Chicago, so he said this was strange to him, but he followed the policy just the same. Of course, it was interesting to me how they would admit blacks there and wouldn't do it here. As far as I know, Mexicans were not segregated in the theater in the same way blacks were.

Retail stores would take your money. I had many fights. I was quite the one to get into fights, because I thought I could change this thing. I'd go into a store, and I'd stand there and wait and wait and wait. When *everybody* else had been waited on, finally they'd say, "Did you want something?"

I'd say, "Well, I didn't come in here to...." But they would sell whatever you wanted to buy.

I don't know that there was very much difference between the stores. I was buying a *lot* of medicine in those days, because my father had to have medicine night and day. I went into one of the drugstores where I had been buying medicine for months. I had a headache because I was watching the Helldorado parade. I told the clerk I wanted an aspirin, and I would like to have a glass of water, please. He said, "You're going to have to go in the back to drink it." To drink the water, mind you, with the aspirin! That *really* burned me up. I almost had a fit, because I imagined all the money I had spent in there.

In clothing stores we did not have trouble trying clothes on, but we were treated in a manner that we knew we weren't wanted. But where were you going to buy clothes or whatever you had to have? You had to buy them somewhere. You could buy things in the stores even in the South, if you could stand long enough to get waited on, and you could stand the insults--the way they talked to you. But I wasn't afraid here.

Las Vegas compared unfavorably to the situation in Chicago. I had no problems in Chicago. I think once or twice in a drugstore they kept putting me off and wouldn't wait on me. We finally broke that up. Black people in Chicago have *always* been very militant. We have all kinds of laws against discrimination--on the books, anyway--in Illinois. Las Vegas was much worse. Oh, my goodness, yes! I should say so. We used to call it the Mississippi of the West. We finally decided that we just weren't going to put up with it anymore, and we were going to change things, and we did.

Fox's Restaurant always served Negroes. [It is now Foxy's Firehouse Casino on Las Vegas Boulevard.] Mr. Julius Fox owned it. It was a kosher place where they served food that Jewish people generally eat. There's always

been a fairly good relationship between blacks and Jews most everywhere, and in Chicago *very, very* much so. I ate several times at Fox's Restaurant. By the time he changed over and added slot machines this other matter of segregation had been reconciled. I remember that the NAACP gave him an award for being willing to serve Negro people. I think it was the *only* place in town. You couldn't even eat at a hot dog stand at this time! [laughs]

I think Mexicans could eat at places blacks couldn't, so I never heard them making too much noise about it. They were discriminated against, but not in the same way that the black people were. However, white professionals would serve blacks. I noticed that my doctor of the early years just passed away; I saw that in the paper this morning. He was Jewish. Looking back on it, I think Jewish people were more likely to welcome Negro people. But, as far as I know, nobody turned black people down for professional services.

* * * * *

I didn't believe that anything would happen to me if I went into one of the segregated Strip hotels. Oh, I had plenty of courage in those days, my dear! I was like my mother; I was never frightened. A friend of mine, Mrs. Mabel Hoggard, and I would go into the hotels, or any other place we decided to go. If anybody came into town to perform and we wanted to see them, Mrs. Hoggard and I just called and made a reservation. Of course, when we got there, we had problems. Sometimes they would just say, "Well, you're not supposed to be here; you're not supposed to come here." We'd finally talk our way in. We never left. I remember some people being *very much* concerned that the Texans wouldn't show up if they came and found Negroes in the audience. They would say, "It would

hurt the tourist business, and white people wouldn't come."

They had tried to get Josephine Baker to come here many times. She'd tell them that she wouldn't come and entertain for white people where they excluded black people. I think the El Rancho finally gave her a contract, and she came in the early 1950s. They agreed that they *would* allow blacks in. When Miss Baker got to Las Vegas, she went around and found some NAACP people and told them to be sure to come down to the hotel, so we did. I didn't go the first night, but I went the second night, *after* she had entertained, and a few black people went. At that time we had several white people who usually went along with us.

The next night they told Miss Baker that they had followed their contract, because they had allowed blacks to come in one night. She did the whole Westside, and went around and told everybody, "Be sure to come tonight to the hotel." So we went, a whole group of us. Miss Baker told us what to do. We went to the entrance, and they started giving us a story and all. She said, "Now, don't argue with them; don't say anything." One of the white girls with us went over and took some seats--she and two or three more people. Two or three of us went in behind her. Some of the staff came and confronted the white woman. Everybody left.

Josephine Baker said, "Now, you come on over to my cottage, and when the time comes for me to go on the stage, we'll just go on over to the hotel." So we did. I guess there were about 15 or 20 of us, including the white people. So we just walked right through where people were being served. They didn't know what to do, because Miss Baker was in front. I guess they just didn't know how to handle it. Finally, they let us go in, but they wouldn't serve us.

Miss Baker went out on the stage, and she just sat up there. She said, "Now, I'm not going to entertain. You just stay where you are until something happens. I'm going to sit right there till they make up their minds what they want to do." The customers who were trying to get in were upset, because they were standing in line waiting. The others were sitting down waiting for her to come out to entertain. Finally, the management let us in and told us to sit down, and they served us.

Women would do these kinds of things, and men were more reluctant. The men wouldn't go. It's always easier for women. Even in the South, black women have *always* gotten along with the white people, especially men. It was not anything unusual for white men to become involved with black women. That was a normal thing, almost.

Black men in Las Vegas may have been frightened about physical harm. We talked to the men about it, and they said that if they went in, that was a bigger challenge to the whites. They figured that they might *really* get into trouble--somebody might get hurt, because the men couldn't afford to back down if they didn't let them in the white establishments. My husband wouldn't go; neither would Mrs. Hoggard's husband.

Every place was segregated! Sammy Davis, Jr., Nat King Cole and Lena Horne had to come over to Westside to sleep at night. They couldn't sleep in the hotels. There was a lady on the Westside at that time who kept entertainers. Wilson was her name. She had a very nice home, and she just turned it into a place to keep the entertainers.

A SEGREGATED SCHOOL SYSTEM

Mabel Hoggard and I came here about the same time. I met her at the Zion Methodist Church; she was a member there. We got to be friends, and she finally got a job as a teacher in the Westside School. I really wasn't very familiar with what was going on at the time, but I know that the superintendent of schools seemed to be interested in having her become a teacher. She had been teaching in West Virginia, and it wasn't very long before she was hired. On the part of some people there was always an effort to get black teachers. Mabel Hoggard had a reputation for being an excellent teacher, which she was. Her hiring seemed to be something fairly easily accomplished. She had offers to teach in other parts of town after that when we actually got black children into the other areas of town. It wasn't too long before we had black teachers all over the city, and holding other administrative offices--principals.

When Mabel Hoggard first went to teach at the Westside School, the school was not up to standard. She knew that, but she had taught in the South. She was aware of what was

happening, but she never had any desire to go elsewhere. She always said that she would *always* work in West Las Vegas, because that's where she wanted to work.

The schools in Las Vegas were completely segregated until 1972. [In 1968 Mr. Charles Kellar filed suit in federal district court to integrate the Las Vegas school system. In 1970, Judge Bruce Thompson ordered the creation of a plan, which, after several appeals, was put into effect in 1972.--Ed.] Black children went to school in West Las Vegas. I know I did a little substitute work at the Westside, and I never saw any white children at that time. The Westside school is one of the oldest schools, but it's now being used as a sort of a social center.

In Las Vegas, the situation was very similar to the South, even though there were no laws such as existed in the South. Black schools were mostly dilapidated and built in a different manner from the schools in the other areas of the city. Usually, it appeared that teachers were not up to what teachers were in other parts of the city. It was always

stated that the poorest teachers were there. I don't know whether they were or not, but this was the attitude; this was what we felt about it. Most of the black people who migrated to Las Vegas were from the South and were accustomed to this. However, there were always people who complained. Now, the schools here were not segregated legally as they *were* in the South, but it was easy enough to keep the system alive, because hardly *any* black people lived in any other area. These other schools were not close enough to West Las Vegas, and the business of community schools has always been used as a reason why we had segregation.

We were sure that the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* would lead to change in Las Vegas, because this was an NAACP effort. If it happened in the South, certainly it would happen here, because it became a part of the constitution of the United States. It was rough. People fought it most everywhere, but eventually it became an actual practice. In Las Vegas there were meetings with people--administrators and anybody involved in our school board. They knew that they couldn't just say, "Well, we won't do it," because [laughs] they would have been flying in the face of the constitution of the United States.

The big problem was how do you get black children in the community into other schools, when none of us lived in the other areas? That's why we have busing. Busing had already occurred in some parts of the South. There was just no other answer, because you couldn't pick these people up and put them over into other areas of the city. So, we settled for busing, but always with the hope that this would change. We're still concerned and still making efforts to make some changes, because it is not *real* integration. People say, "The schools are integrated." They are *not*

integrated on an equal basis. The busing is more or less one way. White children are bused into this community for *one* year. [Mrs. Johnson is referring to the sixth grade centers.--Ed.] Black children are the ones who are bused in every other year. The sixth grade center idea was just a process of eliminating this system and that system, until it became the thing to do. It was the only choice that we felt we could deal with at the time. I think several people had come up with the sixth grade center idea. Apparently it had been used in other areas.

We had an attorney who actually led that fight--an attorney by the name of Charles Kellar. He was quite a strong character. He had come from New York City and was president of the NAACP for some time. He was the one who actually led that fight. I wouldn't say Mr. Kellar and I were friends. We were associates, because we were working together in the planning with the school system, involving teachers and where they might be employed, plus discussing the conditions that caused a complete separation of the black children from the white children.

I was unhappy about the final plan; I still think it's a poor plan. Black children are still required to ride the bus for most of their lives in the public school system, while the white children are not. That's not real integration. If you take children and they are being bused, they all are going into the other community. They more or less become a group apart. I can't feel that they're fully integrated in that way. Housing is a part of the problem, but there were so many efforts to keep the races separate, and there *still are* people who try to maintain the strictly white neighborhood, and many of them are still maintained.

Generally, we certainly are a lot more integrated than we were 20 or 30 years ago. There is this problem, but it's changing, in that

I think it will not be too long before we will be actually integrated in communities, so that there will be no way to separate the children. I know that there are certainly a large number of black people who now live all over town. When I moved to Paradise Valley in 1945, there was not one single black family, and now there are black people all over the place.

When I moved back to West Las Vegas, I could have lived *anywhere* that I could afford to pay for, and I felt much better as a person. I felt much better, because I had an opportunity to select where I wanted to live, not that I did not wish to live where black people lived. I certainly wished to live where a lot of black people lived. But I don't feel that I have any "own people." I have accepted myself as being just a citizen. I'm thankful that I've been able to live long enough to be able to do this. I favor what is truly integration. Most of the so-called integration has never been real.

If we lose a cohesive black community, I don't think that it will do any harm. I'm not afraid of this. I have heard several white people say, "All black people like to be together." That isn't necessarily so. People like to be together based more on what they have in common than on color. When I lived in the Paradise Valley, I had Chinese, Greek and--as some lady said one night--just some plain ordinary Americans that I rented to. [laughs] There was no problem. I enjoyed their company. We went to each other's homes and entertained each other. I don't think that this business of feeling that we all have to be together is going to continue. We're not the only group; other groups are intermingling. The old establishment of communities where Chinese people live and Japanese people live is slowly changing, too.

When busing occurred on the Westside, some black parents were sorry to see the end of their neighborhood elementary schools.

They didn't like it, because they didn't feel that it was quite fair, and they still do not. They still resent having to have their young children go so far away. Those who have to be bused away some place have to get up so early in the morning. Some people are going to differ with everything that comes out. Some people will not like it, but people have to become accustomed to it. But many parents now still speak out against it. For instance, the school which is now the Mabel Hoggard Sixth Grade Center was one of the last elementary schools where the sixth grade center was established. They fought it for years. I don't really know what all the reasons were, but I know that many wanted to keep it as an elementary school. There are a good number of white children who go to that school now. This Bonanza Village community was once a completely white community. As more and more black people moved in, the percentages were such that it was required to become a sixth grade center. I think one or two black teachers wanted the school to stay as an elementary school.

I never heard any expressions about busing the children from the ministers. Reverend Marion Bennett (of the Zion United Methodist Church) was active during the time that this plan went into effect. I think he was president of the local NAACP. He was the same as all of us who were active in wanting the change. He's not particularly happy with busing. We all wanted *something*; we wanted a change. We finally settled, for the time being, for what we could get now. We expect to make changes later. We know *this*--that whatever any other child gets, our child would have an opportunity to have: a decent school, and the programs would be open to everyone. We don't have to fear that the school would be inferior to what the other children would have.

BONANZA VILLAGE

I sold my Paradise Valley ranch and moved to Bonanza Village in 1979. The people who built Bonanza Village were, when it was constructed, more or less the leading people in Las Vegas. They were white middle class or above, and they were very proud of their neighborhood and their homes. [Bonanza Village was a desirable white subdivision of single-story houses on half-acre lots located off Bonanza Road. It opened in 1946.--Ed.] As happens in most cases, when people learn that other people in what we call the lower socioeconomic situations plan to move near this sort of neighborhood, people protest. People still do it. These people did not want a lower-cost housing project built close to Bonanza Village. So again, we had a fight. It seems that the people in the city were very anxious to build a project, but there were a lot of protests from the people who lived in Bonanza Village.

I was very much involved in the Bonanza Village controversy mainly because I did the survey to determine the needs of this type

of low-cost housing project in the area. I ran into people with whom I discussed this. Some of them were people who were very, very unhappy about the fact. As you know, this happens in *many* places. I never got an understanding of what their objection was, except that they evidently thought that a lot of people would come in who were not only very poor, but people who would affect the neighborhood here--would change its appearance. I spoke to different people. I spoke to a couple of people who lived in Bonanza Village. I came over here and visited one lady and talked to her about it and tried to show her that this was needed, and that it wasn't necessarily going to affect the people in this area. The project was far enough away that it wouldn't have really resulted in these people even getting into their neighborhood. There was no indication that these people were more criminal or too different from what other people were in this area. I think I got a very friendly reception from her and the few other people with whom I discussed

this matter. I told them about my personal experiences, having had problems with living in certain areas--how later it turned out that there was no harm. Nothing was done that was detrimental to the people in that area who were afraid of something happening that would decrease the property values. I think that's a lot of what people think about--that the value of our homes will decrease.

After a lot of discussion and a lot of talking back and forth, it was finally agreed that there would be a barrier between the two areas that would prevent people from either side seeing what was going on. The barrier was a grove--some plants along Highland Avenue between here and where the project is now. I felt that as long as it did not prevent the building of this project, that very little harm could be done. I thought it was better to accept that than to continue to fight and say, "Well, we'll just give up." After all, there is some beauty in the kinds of things that were planted. I do not know where the idea came from. Somebody from the village apparently came up with it, but I couldn't say for sure. It was discussed over and over again. When it was finally done and the houses were built, there was *no* problem at all as far as I know.

The majority of people living in Bonanza Village now are blacks. Things began to change. One or two black people came in because somebody decided to sell their property to some black people. We have the usual things happening--people being told you better sell your property, you better move out, because your property values will be decreased. There was a general movement; people really moved out. It has changed. A lot of improvements have been made. There are a few homes that are not up to standard, but generally it is in good condition. You can see the homes that are here and also the people who live here. A lot of building has

been done; a lot of black people have built new homes--lovely homes.

* * * * *

Project Madison got underway in 1959. It was an urban renewal project--linked with the construction of I-15--that displaced a lot of blacks. Some of the homes were identified as not being livable, and they were torn down. As far as urban renewal, a number of homes had been built, aside from the low-cost housing projects. I am a supporter of the idea of urban renewal. I think that it's certainly an advantage to everybody to have better living accommodations. If houses are completely beyond being redone, refinished, then the only thing to do is to remove them and build new housing, especially for people who can't afford to purchase homes otherwise.

THE NAACP AND CHANGING RACIAL ATTITUDES

If there were whites in Las Vegas who were interested in advancing black causes and in fighting segregation in the late 1940s, I didn't meet any of them. In a situation like this, one doesn't realize how many people there are who would like to do things like that. I don't know whether you would call it fear.... It isn't fear in the true sense of the word, but you don't want to become unpopular. You'd have to be a pretty strong person in order to go out of your way to help people who are looked down upon, because you might be ostracized yourself.

When I came to Las Vegas, there was an NAACP, but there was no Urban League. In the last four or five years the efforts have been made to organize an Urban League. It hasn't been successful. I don't remember if there were any white members in the NAACP at the time that Reverend Henry Cook was president, but I know that when Mr. Arthur McCants was president there were, because he went to anybody that he thought *might* join. [laughs] He pushed everybody: legislators, the mayors, the commissioners. It was

kind of a joke that you could hardly get by Mr. McCants. Mr. McCants was one of the leaders. He lived in West Las Vegas. In fact, he was the first president of the organization.

Later there were a number of white people who were interested in NAACP for instance, a rabbi was vice president of NAACP, and we had several members. It was unusual for whites to hold offices in the NAACP. A white friend of mine who was a schoolteacher was very active in the NAACP, but she was not an officer.

* * * * *

Just before the NAACP actually started its efforts toward getting a civil rights bill, Mrs. Terea Hall Pittman spoke at our annual banquet. At that time she was director of Region I (West Coast) of the NAACP, offices in San Francisco. Mrs. Pittman was a fighter, and she has been one of the most *outstanding* persons in the movement. Her theme was "The Time is Now." It was *very* inspiring. It made it easier for us to get more support.

George Rudiak was running for the state legislature in 1952. At that time we used to have political meetings out at my place in the country. We always had a good many representatives if it was anywhere near election time. People came out, and he was one of the people with whom we had already discussed getting a civil rights law. He stated at this picnic meeting that day that if he got elected he would certainly make an effort to get a civil rights law passed. [George Rudiak introduced a civil rights bill in the state legislature in 1953. It failed.--Ed.] I remember that one of our earlier NAACP presidents, Mr. McCants, had made an effort to get a civil rights law passed.

Our banquets used to bring in a lot of white people. I don't know whether most of them were with us or against us. [laughs] At the time Mr. Rudiak was so friendly, and I guess I just took him for granted. I didn't think of him as being someone who was special. He was generally very friendly and so was his wife. The times that we had picnics she always came out and helped us. We'd sell whatever it was we had prepared, and she was always there--Johnny-on-the-spot. You'd just accept people like that and you don't think of them as being too special. They both are very, very nice people. They were a Jewish family.

* * * * *

The civil rights bill idea came from the NAACP. We were talking to everybody that we got a chance to. We tried to get a law passed in the city when Howard Cannon was the city attorney. I would attend city commission meetings. They couldn't possibly keep a voting citizen out of the meetings that were supposed to be public.

People weren't so anxious for us to speak, but we did. For instance, in 1953 or 1954 I

presented a request for the city to establish a civil rights ordinance. C. D. Baker was the mayor. The commissioners were in the meeting, and they dismissed it, but they came back, and we sat and waited. They went off and had themselves some type of conversation about the presentation.

Mr. Greenspun was there and wrote it up in the *Sun*. I don't remember what all they said, but I know that following that we got an answer. The city's reaction, of course, was not very good. Mr. Cannon finally got some sort of answer from the state that it would not be legal for Las Vegas to pass a civil rights ordinance. I didn't think much of the decision.

We had a *very* sharp attorney then, who was a black man. Franklin Williams was his name. He was at that time chairman of the California area NAACP organization. We were a part of that organization, and he came very often to our meetings. He's very outstanding, even now--a *very, very* brilliant person. We had him come up when they gave us the answer that it was against state law to establish any kind of an ordinance of that type. [Williams argued in favor of the ordinance at commissioners' meetings.--Ed.]

Although Howard Cannon had been running for office, I never got to know him and never tried to. I didn't like his attitude. I've told him about my feelings every time I have had a chance to. Every year, as long as he was being elected, he would come and ask for a meeting, or ask us to meet with him on several occasions. I *always* stood up and said that I could *never* accept his ideas. I could never feel that I could vote for him, because he showed that he was not favorable to our having civil rights on the level that he himself had.

The other thing was that he was *definitely* against busing. That's one of the main things

I used to tell him about. He would always justify his stand. He always made it very clear that there were reasons why he thought busing was wrong, just like he made it clear that it was wrong to pass a civil rights ordinance in the city of Las Vegas. He always had "good" reasons. You know how lawyers can be.... [laughs] I never voted for him, although a lot of the Negro people did, because he was friendly in a way.

* * * * *

When we were trying to pass civil rights bills on the state level, we went up to Carson City many times. We would make an appointment to speak before the legislature. We'd be allowed to speak on a certain occasion, and we'd go up and we would speak. Several of us spoke before the legislature; I did on more than one occasion. At first they were very friendly, until they finally decided that we really meant business.

We did not have picket lines when we went to Carson City. The only thing we did going to Carson City was to speak before the legislature; that's all. I don't remember the NAACP ever picketing anything in relation to the civil rights bill, but I remember some other organization doing it. I participated in a picket line, but I believe it was the Democratic women picketing. It was a *very* difficult situation, because there was no place to sleep or eat when we went to Carson City.

On two occasions we were accepted. The person who represented the West Coast region of the NAACP and I went up one time. Naturally, we got very tired during the night. We stopped at one of the motels. Whoever was on duty evidently hadn't been there very long, because she allowed us to come in and have a room. But the next morning evidently the owner or somebody came in and found

out we were there and said that we'd have to get out. So we did.

At another place--in Reno I believe--somebody allowed us to have a room. It didn't last but a little while. I think about an hour later somebody came.... We didn't want to start any controversies or anything, because we were going to put all our efforts into trying to get this bill passed. So we just moved. We thought getting the bill passed was so much bigger an issue. We finally ended up staying in the cars with three or four people.

We had one white lady who lived here in Las Vegas--Peggy Petrie. She was a housewife, but very active, very much concerned in the area of civil rights. She went with us to Carson City. Almost every time we went she was with us. I think everywhere you go you find a few people. You don't know why they have this attitude, but you find this everywhere.

In northern Nevada we naturally got support from the other black people who lived there, and we had support from some of the university people--some students and some of the members of the faculty. They came and supported us with their presence.

One thing happened that I will always remember: I was walking down the hall one day, and I saw these women coming. I guess there were at least 40 women coming down the hall. I said, "Oh, my gosh. I'm sure these people are coming to speak out against getting this law passed." I walked up to the lady in front and I said, "Are you people interested in the bill?"

The lady said, "Yes, we're going to support it." I had to go some place and sit down and cry. I was just that surprised and elated. They did support it. I guess that's the largest group we had that was supportive. They were from some kind of church organization--not from one church but from several different churches. Some

were even from Las Vegas and other places. It was an interesting time.

As things were starting to happen in other parts of the country, blacks in Las Vegas paid attention. That helped us to get support. The fact that they were succeeding in the South certainly gave us a lot of confidence in ourselves, in being able to accomplish something. The South is supposed to be much more prejudiced than Las Vegas. We thought that if they could do that in the South...golly, we certainly should be able to get rid of *some* of this in Las Vegas!

* * * * *

At the time that I was going to Carson City in the interest of this bill, one afternoon when I came back to Las Vegas, this radio program was on the air. This person said, "I understand that Lubertha Johnson is a card-carrying Communist." I don't know if it was mayor French of Henderson, but it was some official. Nothing ever came of it, because I had no card.

I think I met one Communist in my life, and he *told* me he was a Communist! That was in Chicago. Communists tried to appeal to blacks in Chicago, but they had little success. Generally the Communist party was not attractive, and most thought that association with it meant trouble. I used to see Communists speaking in the parks in Chicago. If I ever met a Communist in Las Vegas, I didn't know it! [laughs]

Accusing people of being Communists was used over and over again. The NAACP was supposed to be a Communist organization. Anyone who was active in any way was--as if we didn't know enough to know when we were mistreated; as if we had to be told by the Communists. That seemed to be the general idea. This is all over, even in Africa, that

Communists are supposed to be responsible for all of the problems.

* * * * *

In the NAACP we elected our presidents like all other organizations. Since the 1960s, each president has a two-year term, and then someone else runs, or that person runs again. We have a nominating committee that brings in persons to be voted on. The person who gets the largest number of votes gets elected.

I was *very* active in NAACP, and I had served already about three terms as the vice-president when I decided to run for president in the mid-1950s. Being a woman was no problem. I never had anyone mention the fact that I shouldn't be elected because I was a woman. I remember a minister who came here from Los Angeles, and he said, "Well, I don't see why you don't elect a woman. Mrs. Warden"--my married name at the time--"would make a good president." He talked about it, and nobody objected.

I was elected to two one-year terms, and I think that I was able to do as well as any of the men were as far as being active. Of course, I have gotten a lot of credit for the work that I did. I have received about three awards from NAACP. I have eight or nine from other organizations as well.

* * * * *

The NAACP was planning a program for Black History Month in the mid-1950s, and there was hardly any place where you could have a program of this type. Just two or three of us went down to the Silver Slipper and talked to whoever was in charge there about it. Bill Willard was the person who I think was most helpful in getting the place for us. Mr. Willard had worked with us before, because

he had charge of our music. (We were doing some singing and some different types of musical activities, and he was in charge of it.) He was a white man. He was the only one who did anything like that at that time. He was working for the *Sun* as a columnist. When we were making our preparations, we were discussing where we would have the event. We talked about it with him, and he just took the responsibility for getting a place. (Bill Willard also helped me build an apartment. I talked to him about helping me to get to the entertainers, to get some renters. I got some tenants out there, and I'm sure he helped.)

I was not surprised that we could rent a room at the Silver Slipper for a black event, because I didn't think much about anything that we *couldn't* do. That was the purpose of our organization--whenever we got to do something that we hadn't done before, we just considered it part of the activity that we were going to be doing all the time. We didn't really think too much about it, I don't think.

* * * * *

The Westside Credit Union is a part of NAACP, in a way. It's sponsored by them. In fact, we have considerably more than a million dollars in this credit union. Woodrow Wilson was the actual organizer and is still the manager. [Woodrow Wilson was Nevada's first black legislator and began his first term in 1967.--Ed.] I invest there, and some of the money that we collect from our business, Operation Independence, we bank there.

* * * * *

In the mid-1950s, I got a nursing job as sort of a protest against discrimination at Southern Nevada Hospital. The hospitals did not hire black nurses. I went to take a friend

of mine to apply. She was an RN, and she had just come back from Africa. She was black, and they did not accept her. They told us both that the nurses would not accept Negroes as nurses in the hospital. When I heard about this practical nurse training, I said, "Well, I'm going to get a job."

I was president of the Las Vegas NAACP at the time, and I intended to use whatever type of force (that's not a good word, but I intended to use it) to try and get the job. After graduating I went and asked for a job with another Negro girl. Finally we were hired. I had talked to some of the board members about it prior to that time, and I had no problems there at all. I worked there for seven years starting in 1954. Ultimately, I don't think that my membership in the NAACP and having them behind me had anything to do with my getting a job. I didn't have to try to use this. I do not know what people may have assisted. There were people on the board who knew me and knew that I was active with the NAACP.

At the time I got the job, racial attitudes had not changed, except that I think some of the board members must have felt that they should hire a Negro. I don't know exactly what happened. I do know that the superintendent of nurses was the wife of a big wheel here in town. The name was Kennedy. I went to work, and after that they hired several nurses. As far as I know, there never were any problems. The nurses told me that they never heard of a problem--that nobody ever even mentioned to them about hiring Negro nurses.

All of them had come from some other place, because there was no training facility in Las Vegas, or even in the state. They all had come from other places where they had Negro nurses. They would not have thought about telling somebody that they wouldn't accept

Negro nurses. I think this was the excuse that they were trying to use to refuse to hire black nurses.

Southern Nevada Hospital, which is now University Medical Center, was strictly segregated. I had gone to the hospital for surgery in 1945 before I became a nurse. The night I was admitted, the nurse on the ward did not know about the policy of discrimination, so I was placed in Ward 4. When another nurse came in the morning, she *really* raised the roof. She took my bed across the hall to what they called the indigent ward, where old people were.

We had no facilities then for seniors, and they were kept in the hospital. People who were unable to pay their bills--that's what they were. She took her arm and pushed this bed all the way down the hall--with me in the bed--into the hall on the indigent ward. I resented that, and I thought, "Someday I'm going to do something about that." In those days I was quite the fighting person. Anyway, that gradually changed. It had changed quite a bit before I left working at the hospital.

Change came about through pressure. The NAACP and other people were, at that time, very active in trying to change things. Other people were applying for jobs. Nurses were coming from other places and applying for work. And people were complaining and reporting this matter of discrimination and segregation. It was pressure; it wasn't just done to be sweet and kind, but because of pressure.

* * * * *

I was pressuring everybody and anything! [laughs] The NAACP spoke on television. I spoke on television, on radio and anywhere I could get an opportunity to speak, and we wrote letters to the newspaper; we went

to the city and the county authorities, and complained. Some officials would say, "Well, I think you're right." Whether they meant it or not, you never knew. Some would give you all kinds of reasons why it shouldn't be: "After all, the races are different, and we're different people, and I know that most people like to be together. I know that most Negro people like to be with their own." They would say that sort of thing. They never knew any such thing, but that's the way they felt.

For instance, I started to sell my property one time, and some very wealthy man came out and talked about it. He was brought out by a real estate man, and he really wanted the property. It was a beautiful piece of land. He said, "Now, you really want to sell this?"

And I said, "Well, yes, I do."

He said, "Well, you know, you couldn't live here unless you wanted to work for me." This even embarrassed the salesman! [laughs]

Then his wife spoke up, and she said, "Well, I *know* that the black people or Negro people like being with their own."

I said, "And I suppose, since I own the property and you don't, I've been superior to you, so I think you may have a job with me instead of me with you." That's the tone...that's the way I felt about it. Interestingly enough, there were so many people, especially in those days, who thought they were really *upright*. They thought that this was just the way things were supposed to be. He knew nothing about me whatever, but he knew that I was inferior to him. How did he know? But this was an acceptable kind of philosophy in those days and still is with a lot of people.

BLACKS AND LOCAL POLITICS

Black attitudes in Las Vegas differed from the black attitudes I had known in Chicago. Las Vegas is one of those new towns to black people, but the black people in Chicago were *well* established. They'd been there for years and years and years, while these people in Las Vegas were entirely new. They had to move from a different environment. In Chicago, way back years ago, black people were elected to office in state positions. There were many different organizations, and especially political activities. For some reason they have become very much motivated and very active in Chicago. Even by the time *I* got to Chicago in 1923, they were already in the middle of their fight.

Black people in Las Vegas were in no position to be demanding. In Chicago, people had already dug in; they had bought homes; they had got good jobs; many of them were well educated, which was not true of this group. People in Chicago were teaching; they were in the school system;

they had entered into everything by this time. In fact, Chicago was really founded by one black man by the name of Du Sable. [Jean Baptiste Pointe Du Sable (1750-1818) was a black pioneer trader who founded, through 20 years of residence on the site, the settlement that later became Chicago.-Ed.] These people were *way* on their way to becoming a very active and strong part of the city government and any other type of organization within the city.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Las Vegas blacks were more or less the underprivileged. They were not typical of blacks in the South, because the black in the South has always, for the past hundred years or so, been in the picture as far as gaining a lot of prestige. There are many prestigious black people in the South, and they own their own homes; a lot of them are professional. This was an entirely different type of people, generally speaking. They were surely ambitious, otherwise they wouldn't have come here, but they just had not had the opportunities.

The people who were going well in the South had no reason to leave and come here, so they didn't.

* * * * *

Ernie Cragin was mayor when I came here. I wasn't too active at that time, but I was aware enough of his attitude. He talked down to us as if we were really stupid for thinking that we should be treated like anybody else. As strange as it seems, most people don't like to be identified in conversation as being prejudiced. They like to avoid showing that they are really prejudiced, most people do. He was one who was prejudiced and tried his very best to uphold his beliefs and attitudes. He conducted himself as if it was *really* the right thing to do. I remember on many occasions when I have spoken to people about being prejudiced. They would always say something like, "No, I'm not prejudiced," while showing it all the time. We didn't deal with Mayor Cragin.

Mayor Baker was not as arrogant as Mayor Cragin. He didn't express himself in a way that made you feel as if he really was definitely against you. He never did anything for us. Mayor Oran K. Gragson was different. He was good to deal with. Gragson was a very nice person. I wouldn't say that he went out of his way to do anything for us, but he certainly didn't fight against us. You could always talk to him. We were accepted as far as coming in for discussions or anything of that sort.

* * * * *

Most blacks in Las Vegas identified with the Democratic party. Most still do. I definitely identified with the Democratic party. That's not only in Las Vegas, it's national. In the 1940s and 1950s I don't think the local Democratic party did anything at all

outstanding for blacks--anything that I could remember that was even worth mentioning. But, on the *national* level, I believe most of us felt that the Democratic party did much more, especially in the way of attempting to make it possible for black people to get jobs where they had not been able to get them before.

There were very few black Republicans locally. Now, in 1966 we did elect a Republican--Woodrow Wilson. He was the only outstanding Republican elected during that time, as far as I can remember. There are a number of black people who remain loyal to the memory of the early Republican party, which supposedly freed us from slavery. For many years black people were very loyal to the Republican party. It was mostly during the Roosevelt years that black people actually turned to the Democratic party.

The local Democratic party was headed by Al Cahlan and Archie Grant. Because of the general relationship between blacks and whites, I felt strongly at that time that they were actually anti-black. The newspaper was extremely anti-black. We were always discussing in our own meetings the nature of the publications, and how they made it appear that there was something very, very wrong with most blacks. This sort of permeated the whole town in many ways, with few exceptions.

Reverend John L. Simmons was involved in the Democratic party. He was active politically. He sort of promoted groups to vote in the elections. He had some connections with the white power structure. I do not know personally who these people were, but I know that he was active and involved. I'm sure that he was able to use his influence to get people to vote. This would be involving individuals. For instance, if somebody was running for election, then he would be able to influence certain people to vote for that

particular candidate. I know that there were a lot of white people who favored him in many ways. For instance, they would talk to him about getting people to vote for a certain candidate and that sort of thing. That's done often with ministers, because they have a following, you know.

The only experience I had with local parties ever doing anything for blacks to try to attract their votes was discussing with a few people like Mr. Rudiak their ability to do something in the legislature--something that might help us to pass some laws that would outlaw certain discriminatory practices. A few more people in that category did mention, when we discussed it in their presence, the need for eliminating these practices. Some of them said, "If I get to the legislature, I will certainly introduce legislation that would outlaw those discriminatory practices." I remember that some people sought the black votes, because any vote counts. As far as I know, most of it was based on what they might do to change the segregation pattern and see that laws were passed--promises like that.

I think it has been important for blacks in Las Vegas to get the support of whites for their causes. I think we have to realize that people who have the power are people to whom we must appeal for support. It's the only way that we can really win, and we did get the support of a good many people; otherwise we could not have made the progress that we have. In order to get the equal rights law, to get the housing law, and to generally change the patterns of discrimination, we had to have and we did get the support of some of the people in authority.

* * * * *

The Nevada Voters League was established by the NAACP in the 1950s. The

NAACP cannot endorse candidates, and we organized this group in order to encourage people to vote for certain candidates. Where NAACP could not support a candidate, this organization could. [In addition, the Voter's League discouraged the practice of certain Westside ministers of accepting bribes from candidates to "deliver" the votes of their congregations.--Ed.]

Doctors James McMillan and Charles West were involved in the development of the Nevada Voters League, but as far as being completely responsible, they were not. This Voters League was organized prior to their even coming to Nevada. I just don't want to have the credit taken from people who actually started this movement. Dr. West certainly did have some part in the organization, because he ran for office.

* * * * *

There were many people who were *very* active and were moving toward making changes before we had any of the black professionals, such as Drs. McMillan and West and Attorney Charles Kellar, come in to Las Vegas. Earlier, most of the people who came seeking jobs and seeking a better way of life for their families and their children were generally not educated. I think the professional blacks appreciated what had been done before they came, and they used their own knowledge and their own experience to help to bring about the necessary actions. I don't believe they had radically different styles of leadership than some of the older people who'd been here. Whatever they did, they still had to have the cooperation of the people who were already involved. They had to work and deal with these people. I don't think it was hard for the black professionals to assume leadership. I think we appreciated

their abilities. When we were working very hard way back as far as when I came in 1943, there were some people even *then* actively engaged in efforts to do something about changing the patterns of discrimination and segregation. I would say that I was among the first to encourage bringing these black professionals in and using them, using their expertise and their experience, because some of them had been active in other NAACP organizations.

* * * * *

On a Saturday afternoon, following the establishment of the Human Rights Commission when Grant Sawyer was governor, I was called by a representative of the governor's office. This person told me that I should not leave home; that I should stay and be listening for a call from the governor's office, because the governor was going to appoint me executive director of the Human Relations Commission. So I did stay home, but I never received a call from the governor's office.

The next morning I was told by Reverend Prentice Walker, who was very close to the governor, that some people had gotten together and persuaded the governor to appoint Mr. Bob Bailey as executive director or secretary...whatever the proper name might be. I was disappointed, to say the least, but I am sure that the people who were influential felt that Bob Bailey was the most logical person to have the position. Of course, I only know one person who was involved, according to the Reverend Walker, and that was Dr. West. But I'm sure there were others who were associated with him.

Mr. Bailey was associated with the younger people who came in the 1950s, like

Dr. West and Dr. McMillan. I would say he was very close to Dr. West. He came to Las Vegas to work at the Moulin Rouge Hotel, and he worked there until the hotel was closed. Mr. Bailey was quite an interesting person, and very good in his position. He served as MC for the programs that were being produced at the Moulin Rouge. He once worked for Operation Independence; he was hired as director of the Manpower Program at one time following the closing of the Moulin Rouge. He went on to be politically important in the black community, and he now has a position in the federal agency involved in making loans for purposes of establishing business enterprises and other similar activities.

THE LAS VEGAS PRESS AND THE WESTSIDE; THE MOULIN ROUGE AGREEMENT

You didn't need to guess what the *Review-Journal* thought about black people in general. Because of the way they presented their news, you would think Westside people were from another planet. In those years, the *Review-Journal* would always refer to us as "colored people." Everything was more or less presented in a comical manner. If they quoted some black person, they always did their best to do it in the way that black people are *supposed* to speak, not necessarily the way they *did*. Any time they quoted you, they would say "y'all" and that sort of thing. They were very, very...unkind is about the best way I can say it. In their way, they made it a lot worse than it really was, as far as the ignorance was concerned. You were supposed to be so ignorant that you hardly knew up from down. We didn't respond in a way that was pleasant, because we all certainly were aware of it and detested their manner and attitude and the way they treated the black people.

I had a personal experience with the *Review-Journal*. There was a family that had

lived in Carver Park--I don't think they lived in Carver Park at the time. There was this young lady who was protecting her mother. She did something to the stepfather; she probably stuck him with an ice pick or some thing like that. She was placed in some kind of a detention home. We had a law even then that juveniles were supposed to be treated entirely differently, but the police went in and woke her up in the middle of the night with her gown on, took pictures of her and put them on the front page. I got her mother to sue the *Review-Journal*, and we won our case. At that time I was chairman of the grievance committee of NAACP, but we didn't sue them as NAACP. We had her sue them as a citizen. I don't think we went to court. We did get a pretty nice settlement for the family.

Anything that the *Review-Journal* had to do reporting the news involving blacks was always ugly. John Cahlan and Al Cahlan were editing the *Review-Journal* in the 1940s and 1950s. We tried to speak to them, but they didn't want to accept or discuss it. It was a

very bad situation. They would more or less make a joke out of events on the Westside. They would treat a situation as if it was an incident dealing with somebody in a comic situation, like in a show. It was never reported in any intelligent or straightforward manner, as it would have been if the person was not Negro.

Florence Lee Jones, the wife of John Cahlan, covered the Westside. She and I had some discussions. In the mid-1950s there was some type of organization of social workers that was planning to have a convention in Las Vegas. The NAACP complained to them so that they wouldn't come to Las Vegas for their convention because of the prejudiced situation here. Why would a social service organization want to come here when the black social workers couldn't stay in the hotels or get any decent kind of accommodations? Florence Lee was very unhappy about that. The social workers just didn't come. There were a lot of discussions about it. I think Florence must have written an article about it. I called her and talked to her about it and told her what I thought. She was very unhappy, and that's why she wrote an article criticizing our not wanting these people to come. It was just a part of the battle as far as we were concerned.

I don't know if Florence visited places on the Westside and tried to write up news; I don't remember that. I think she made her comments from the items that came into the paper more than going over there and speaking to people. I got the feeling that she didn't appear to have any real animosity toward Negroes or the Westside. She was part of a system, and I don't think she would have been allowed to do anything else. You can't afford to go too far out if you *are* sympathetic. I think the family would have objected, even if she had been interested or sympathetic or

wanted to do anything in favor of the Negro people.

* * * * *

There was another paper called the *Age*. It was very small and had no power. There was no black paper here in 1945. We started a paper later with the NAACP, called *The Missile*. Then Dr. Charles West took it over in 1963, renamed it the *Las Vegas Voice*, and published it for a number of years. It was purchased two or three times over, and it's still being run by some gentleman here as the *Sentinel Voice*.

* * * * *

Mr. Hank Greenspun, who is Jewish, was *very, very* friendly as far as we could tell. When he came and started his paper, the *Las Vegas Sun* in 1950, we were so happy. Hank Greenspun's paper was entirely different in the way it approached news. It was quite acceptable to the average Negro person. We considered him very friendly, and we really thought about him as in our corner. I do remember wanting to meet him because of his attitude and the way he published the paper--the way he treated the news as it came from West Las Vegas. We noticed a change right away. He didn't use these words that were changed to make black people sound like old-fashioned people from years and years back. He treated the news like any other paper in any other city. It wasn't quite perfect, and it still isn't. [laughter] But it was so much better. He used to come to NAACP meetings. I have a picture showing the time that he took out a life membership. I suppose Mr. Greenspun was sincere. At least if he won the people of West Las Vegas, I guess it brought some sort of strength to the

paper. He was having problems getting the *Sun* really established.

I don't consider that Mr. Greenspun is as friendly now as he was earlier. For instance, he doesn't affiliate with the NAACP anymore, for one thing. He had a young black man working for him who wrote the news about black folk only, which many of us resented. It sort of opened the door for people to use him against other black people. You know how that can happen. Sometimes things were printed that were not really true. We resented that and told him so. Mr. Greenspun always acted as if he felt that it was the thing to do; it was all right. But then it finally got so bad that he did eliminate this young man. I felt that he should have replaced him. He should have found someone who was capable and have them represent black people *only* as any other reporter, and let him write about everybody. I didn't see the need of having somebody *just* to write about the Negro people. Mr. Greenspun seemed to think that was a very fine idea; we should be proud of that.

* * * * *

We gave Mr. Greenspun an award; we just thought he was really grand in the old days. He did act as a mediator at the Moulin Rouge meeting in 1960 when we worked out a general agreement to discontinue discrimination in the places of public accommodation. It was an important event to those of us who were really in the fight. This kind of discrimination was being practiced all over the country for the most part. Even in the South they were breaking down these discriminatory patterns in the restaurants. The NAACP decided that we were going to discontinue having to put up a fight.

We decided that what we were going to do was march down on the Strip. We had our

meetings, and we organized our people into groups. We had committees. About seven or eight of us had a group that they were supposed to supervise, so that everyone who went would do the same thing. The action would be just exactly the way we planned it. We had meetings where we set up certain rules and regulations that we were going to follow. We didn't want to have any violence. When we started our meetings, we were holding them in an office and actually called them "secret meetings." Somebody tipped off the newspapers that we were planning to march on the Strip on a Saturday night. The word went out with the newspaper headlines saying, "Negroes to March on Strip." Somehow it got to Mr. Greenspun. We knew that it had been reported, that we were planning to march.

Mr. Greenspun was not in on the secret that I know of. We preferred to surprise. We were going to march, but we wanted it to be a shock--a surprise. We wouldn't have leaked it, otherwise we wouldn't have been meeting secretly at night. I believe Mr. Alan Jarlson, the person who reported for the *Sun*, told somebody else about our plans. I don't know how he found out, but he did. I felt that he was sympathetic to blacks. I didn't know him that well, but I met him. Generally, in his conversation and all, I had the feeling that he was at least sympathetic. At least he had a kind of show of concern for the problems. NAACP meetings were covered.

Mr. Jarlson probably saw a letter that Dr. McMillan had written, and then he went to Hank Greenspun. Dr. McMillan was always writing letters and always making speeches on television and saying the same thing. It wasn't anything different. I don't think that particular letter would have frightened or... not any more than all of the other things that we did--all the letters that were written.

Everybody tried to talk to the governor and had meetings with him and several leading people. Mr. Greenspun was one who attended some of the meetings, so he heard all the talk about something was going to happen, something has to be done and that sort of thing. So, it wasn't anything unusual. People had heard this kind of talk before.

Prior to the planning we had made efforts to talk to some of the hotel owners, to the governor and to some of the city officials, but we didn't make any headway. We were told that they were out of town or they were not able to receive us or they were too busy. Mostly they were supposed to be out of town. Interestingly enough, when this headline came out, "Negroes to March on Strip," everybody got back to town: the governor, the hotel owners, everybody. Naturally, they were very upset. They contacted us. They made some effort to see if they could talk us into some kind of compromise. By that time there was a lot of talk. Everywhere there was quite a lot of interest on the part of most citizens.

I don't know how Mr. Greenspun happened to become the person who would actually act as the mediator, but that's what happened. Evidently they had this meeting among themselves. Mr. Greenspun came up with the plan as to what we would do: we would have a meeting with some of the hotel owners, the governor, the city mayor, the commissioners and so forth. That's when we met in the Moulin Rouge on a Sunday morning.

It felt as if something important was going to happen. We *really* felt this way because at least some of us were surprised that these people would even come to this meeting. I know I was. Some of them had expressed themselves in such a way that we expected them to continue to hold out for

these practices forever. Just a few days before this incident I had talked to a person in one of the hotels, and he said to me, "I wouldn't even let my mother into this hotel if I thought she would lose business for me. That's what would happen if we allowed Negroes to come in." With that kind of sentiment, it really was something very special to have these people actually come to this meeting, including the governor, the power structure representing the hotels and the city and the county, and the representatives from the police department.

I didn't have any inkling of what the agreement would be before we went in. I don't know if anybody did. I think there certainly was a feeling on everybody's part that this was something that was going to mean a great deal in the city of Las Vegas. I thought the establishment would come in with some phony offer. When Negroes did participate in political activities they'd always give you \$1,000 or \$500. I didn't think too much of money, but I thought it would be some kind of a compromise offer.

We knew that we couldn't accept a compromise, because we had all these people behind us who had put their money in and had made these meetings. They were sincere, and they had decided that we *just* were not going to put up with this practice any longer, whatever the cost. Prior to this time, we had several meetings in churches. We had a large church; about the largest one--and people put in all the money they could afford to support some activities. We didn't talk too much about what we were going to do. Everybody knew that we were going to make a supreme effort to have this discrimination discontinued.

The march was just one of the things that we planned to do. Many things were happening in other places. People were boycotting, and they were doing many

different things. We decided that in this city, particularly, the march was the thing that we would use. You have all these people coming in here over the weekend. This would not only show Las Vegas how we felt and how determined we were, but it would also show thousands of people who were coming from other cities, other parts of the United States. This would affect their business in some way. We knew it was bound to.

The decision to march was a group decision. You can't have everybody making decisions. You have to have some people who have been in the forefront for the most part trying to make policy. But you talk to everybody; you listen. When we had a big meeting everybody would have a chance to get up and make a suggestion. We didn't just do this overnight. We planned it, and we had meeting after meeting; we raised funds.

You have to inspire people. To get them concerned, you have to have people make speeches and give their opinion. For instance, we could cite examples in the South, and we would say, "Now, if people can do this in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, we certainly can do it here." I'm *sure* that we had the approval of the majority of the people. We talked about how we would do it, how we would go about it, how we would conduct ourselves.

We asked everybody to cooperate with our plan, and I'm sure we would have had enough support. I still believe that we would have had enough people to win, because at that time people in this part of the country were very sensitive to marching or picketing. Depending on tourists for the money that they needed to make, they certainly did not want to lose that money. They had never experienced anything of this sort. They were concerned, very much concerned as to what would happen.

In those days I was gung ho. I had complete confidence in what I was doing. I didn't think anything about violence, but I had experienced violence, and it wasn't anything new. It wouldn't have surprised me if it had happened.

We had some white people who were very active in NAACP, but I don't think any whites would have marched with us on the Strip. We never approached any whites about marching that I remember. The white citizens of Las Vegas may have become so concerned about this incident because this was the first time we had really taken any action. You can talk about things for years, but nobody pays too much attention. But this time they *knew* that we *really planned to do it!* We weren't just talking about something having to be done. We were in the process of doing it for the first time.

There was nothing that the public saw or heard in advance. As I mentioned before, we were having night meetings that we thought were secret meetings, which they were. Most people didn't know that we had gone that far with our plans, that we were setting up our strategy at the time, the few days before we planned to actually take this action. When the announcement was made, it wasn't made saying that Negroes plan to do this or that plan...it said, "Negroes will march." We *were* going to march on the Strip *that very week*.

There was tension at the Moulin Rouge meeting. Some people were completely silent, and others spoke up. Some of them did not particularly like having to face the situation and change it, but they felt that they really had no choice. Most of the people at the meeting I didn't even know. I didn't know what their attitudes had been before. There were some of them who appeared to me to be slightly unhappy with the situation, but I think they

had *made* their decision before we actually got a chance to observe their attitudes.

Mr. Greenspun was the person who actually carried the discussion, and they met all our demands fully. We were surprised by that, but it happened. It was unbelievable! We did accept the plan that Mr. Greenspun offered, that this practice of discrimination should be discontinued, period. It was pretty clear and pretty plain. Everybody seemed to have been resigned to the fact that it would be a decision in our favor. It probably was recorded, but we didn't really get the final decision of all of the people until after the meeting.

When I left, I didn't have the sense of victory. I wondered if this was going to be another one of those things where you get a promise and it isn't followed through on; whether this was going to be one of those things where you are sold a bill of goods. I think we all felt more or less the same way. Maybe somebody had a little more confidence than I, and then maybe someone else didn't have as much. The meeting was the talk for months.

After the decision was made, it was immediately evident that blacks were going to be served. We just went in and tried to gamble. I didn't go, but several people did. I was surprised at the ease with which the system fell apart. I expected that a certain portion of them would comply, and some wouldn't, and then we'd have to have the fight all over again.

We had one person (he wasn't at the meeting) who said he would *never* accept Negro people into his place of business. This was Abe Miller, who owned the Sal Sagev on the corner of Main and Fremont. We were told by people who went into his place after this agreement that he refused to serve black

people. He was the only one, and he held out for quite some time.

At this time we established a human relations commission that was supported by the city, the county and North Las Vegas. At our meetings we talked about it. [The Southern Nevada Human Relations Committee was formed as part of the agreement.--Ed.] A couple of times we went down to talk to Mr. Miller, and he said he wasn't going to change. About the third time that we went to talk to him, before we could get in the door to sit down, he said, "Here's my letter. Here's my letter." He said, "I've written to my constituents, and I have told them that I am turning over the hotel...turning over the stock..." (or whatever it was) "because I just don't think I can stand the pressure." So that was that. There may have been other little places here and there, but I know all of the main hotels except this one followed the agreement.

Eventually, it become easier for blacks to find work in hotels. We did get more jobs along with service. That was another one of our fights--to get more people employed, and we finally did. It took something like two or three years. We even established a committee. Once each month we held meetings with the hotel representatives. Hotel owners themselves seldom came, but they sent representatives from their personnel departments. We'd talk about whether they had followed through on their agreement regarding employment. We finally got help from the federal government. We even got the hotels to promise to make a pledge to hire a certain number of black people.

For instance, James (Jimmy) Gay used to work in the hotels. They gave him some jobs that were supposed to be prestigious. I think they were trying to use Mr. Gay. For instance,

an uptown hotel had him as assistant manager or some such thing. [Mr. Gay was assistant personnel director for the Sands Hotel and Casino from 1952 to 1970.--Ed.] That's a name, of course. Then in a couple of other hotels, he had a very prestigious-sounding job. Of course, he's a wonderful person. Mr. Gay is a very fine person. (He's about lost his health, however. He lives right around the corner from me.)

As a result of these meetings and these activities, we certainly became a people who had more of a sense of change and more respect and a better life. We got a state law prohibiting race discrimination in employment. We got a law prohibiting discrimination in housing. We were more or less fighting all these battles at the same time. [A bill passed by the state legislature in March 1956 outlawed discrimination in public accommodations and employment. Legislation outlawing residential segregation did not pass the state legislature until 1971.--Ed.]

A little side thought: sometimes I wish that we *had* marched on the Strip. But maybe we wouldn't have had as many people as we had hoped, if we had actually had to go through with the march. We came up with several different numbers that we expected. It's possible that most of the people would have watched, too. We all discussed all angles of this situation--what might happen, and what we hoped would happen. But we were so enthusiastic until we just knew that we were going to win. You *have* to feel that way or else you can't go on and do what you are trying to do. You have to have confidence that you are going to win. And we had it. I think we expressed this thought (after we were successful) saying that *maybe* it was a good thing that we didn't have to march.

There were people who were not in favor of the march. There were several black people employed as janitors and maids, and some people felt that we would lose the fight and that these people then would actually be eliminated. That was their thinking. Some of the ministers did express this same idea--that the people who had jobs would lose them. It wasn't anything about whether marching was the wrong thing. The jobs were the major concern.

* * * * *

After blacks were able to patronize Strip establishments, businesses on the Westside lost some business. That's one of the negative situations. That happened all over the country. (In Chicago, I know that personally.) You see, it's very difficult for people to establish clubs or hotels that could compete in any way with the Strip hotels. You would think that maybe out of loyalty most people would go to the black-owned hotel, but it doesn't work that way. I suppose it's a normal thing. If I owned a hotel here--let's say even in this spot--and I couldn't provide the kind of entertainment and accommodations that Caesar's Palace could provide, I guess I'd go to Caesar's Palace *if* I didn't feel the way I do, because I never go. The only time I *really* went to the hotels very much was when I was just going to see what would happen during the days of segregation. It bothers me; it still bothers me a great deal, because I feel that with all the problems and with all of the years of denial, I can't see blacks supporting a group of people who for so long were so partial. I'm sure that a lot of people might not think too much about it.

There are a *lot* of black people who come into this town never knowing that there is a Westside. They read the casino ads and

everything, and then people talk about Las Vegas. When they come, there's nothing interesting enough compared to what they can see in the other part of the city. The white hotels really made an effort to get black people in, because money looks good--anybody's money looks good. After people started going in and the walls didn't fall down, then they thought they might as well take advantage of it. And they still do. Some of them actually went after black patronage. For instance, if a black person runs a newspaper, the hotels will put in ads; they'll advertise their activities.

THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY BOARD AND OPERATION INDEPENDENCE

I work in a private housing project now. My preschool is located in the Sierra Nevada Arms housing project. It is called Operation Independence. When the poverty funds came to Las Vegas--or when they were talked about before we actually had them--people came from Washington and different places and talked about the amount of money that we were going to get. At that time, a very high percentage of people in this area were on welfare, and I thought, well, we'll never be dependent again! It didn't work out that way, but that was my feeling. That's why it was called Operation Independence.

I met Mrs. Elaine Walbroek when she first came into West Las Vegas and started getting people together to talk about the amount of money that would be available for establishing anti-poverty programs in the area. At these meetings, I usually talked a lot, and for that reason I'm sure Mrs. Walbroek started asking me questions and asking me if I would work with her to try to establish this program.

I helped as much as I could. I told her about the situation involving poverty in West Las Vegas and many other problems that I thought might be important for securing funds for the community. I gave her all the information I possibly could, which amounted to quite a bit regarding the need for certain types of training and for child care, and whatever other conditions existed that I thought could be aided through the program. I did *not* do very much of the writing, but when she wanted to write a proposal, she usually asked me to express my opinions--much of which she did include in the proposals that were written. [As executive director of the Nevada Tuberculosis and Health Association, Mrs. Elaine Walbroek submitted the first proposal for a federal grant for Operation Independence in 1963.-Ed.]

Mrs. Walbroek was new here. She may have spent time in Las Vegas, but I'm sure she was not at all familiar with West Las Vegas, and she needed a lot of help. I was not

employed at the time, so I had a lot of time to give, which I did.

At that time I was involved in the whole project, which was originally a many faceted poverty program. We had funds for this and that. At first we had four different projects. Head Start was a part of it. Operation Independence had a manpower program and different community service programs. I was involved in setting it up, but you had to have a board before you could actually receive the funds. Mr. David Hoggard was involved, and several other people in the community--for instance, the Assistant Superintendent of Schools. There was a schoolteacher, and we had two attorneys. Tony White was an attorney for the gas company, and he got to be a justice of the peace. Now he's a full-fledged judge. There were two other black people; they had come into this city recently, and both of them were on our board. There was a doctor on the board, also.

West Las Vegas was selected as one of the more needy areas in the country, along with a lot of other places. We had to do certain things in order to receive the funds, which we did. This was Mr. Johnson's Great Society.

A very large organization was established. We kept the manpower program for quite a while, and then we finally ended up with just the Head Start Program, and that's where we still are. Our own preschool operation actually pulled out of the big organization, and we became a private preschool. The school has retained the name Operation Independence.

Operation Independence pulled out of the larger Economic Opportunity Board (EOB) organization, because there were problems that were unpleasant, things that came about that we decided were not fair. When I was elected to be the director of Operation Independence, I think there was

some thought that Elaine Walbroek should have been given the position. She actually came in and talked about the money and had some connections in Washington and wrote a proposal. She had expected to be made the director, and she wasn't. I was selected instead, and that apparently started the whole thing, because then she got together with some people, and they set up another board out in the county just long enough to get it going--the Economic Opportunity Board of Clark County. Then they moved it back in, and they became a part of the West Las Vegas organization.

West Las Vegas was selected to be *the* program at the time of Operation Independence, because it was in what we called the impact area. It was the lowest on the economic scale. Mrs. Walbroek stayed around for a few years, and then other people came in. Gradually they just took over our projects. I guess somebody ought to dispute me, but I'll say it was politics. I knew nothing about politics, and I didn't make any fight.

Mrs. Walbroek was unhappy with my being in a leadership position, although I was helping her. She had no Westside contacts, and she relied on me. She said, "Well, we're going to set up a separate board and then we'll get more money. We'll get a lot more money. If you help me...." I was familiar with the community boards because I had been involved in several boards in the city. So she set out to get around this.

I thought that this was going to be just an organization to provide funds for the smaller groups, but then I found out that they were using the money to organize programs, more or less in competition or conflicting with our programs. They took the money over from the Head Start program. I was still supposed to be there, but they had all the authority and all the money. I had to go to them for all

the money that I wanted; anything I wanted to do. I had to get their permission. After a while--not in the beginning--I would have to go to them, and finally their Economic Opportunity Board just took over all the money, because they got to be so big. I had on my Operation Independence board the Assistant Superintendent of Schools, and so forth. When I think about it now, they took over my board and used it to build their board. I was still thinking that I was ahead, because I still thought that they were not going to operate programs, that they were only going to issue the money out to other groups.

There were other groups, too--the National Association of Latin Americans (NALA) people were trying to establish themselves. They were mostly Mexican people. They got together with Mexicans and Spanish people--some Cubans. We all were unhappy about what happened, because we had our own separate programs. When this big EOB group actually got their power, they then took over all of the money, and then the rest of us had to get our money from them. It's getting bigger and bigger all the time.

Finally Mrs. Walbroek left, but another white person came. Anyway, the Economic Opportunity Board got to be bigger and bigger, and a lot of people from other areas of the city came in. The Economic Opportunity Board has been designated now by Congress, I understand, as *the* representative board, and they get all the money. You see, at first this money was appropriated *only* for West Las Vegas, and then of course, it was changed.

I could get funds for my preschool through the Economic Opportunity Board. We could, if we made the effort. In fact, I like it much better being independent of the EOB, because these boards and these politicians get to be something. I don't think now that West Las Vegas is getting a fair shake from

the Economic Opportunity Board, because it has become so big. They've got, I don't know how many programs. They've got *so many* programs, which I think is very unfair.

I have told the powers that be the same thing, so I'm not afraid of saying it. I think you can get too big. You can get too many things that you're doing, and I don't think it's as effective. The city got into it; the county got into it, and all of the big wheels; everybody got into it. Everybody was getting a piece of the pie, when at first it was completely local. The more people that got into it, of course, the more money that they could get. That meant that the smaller groups--like Operation Independence had gotten to be--didn't get as much.

Operation Independence wasn't incorporated before there was an EOB, but after they got all the money and got all the power, we just felt we had to, because there was such a *great* need for child care. It was my personal decision to go independent, and I persuaded my board, and they agreed. Some of the people on my board had already become a part of the EOB board. Nobody, I guess, actually realized what was going on, but some of the people came along with me. We have some of those people who are still on the board. There were no divisions when we decided to break off. We didn't have any fights or anything like that. I, with a few other people, decided that it would be better.

There was such a great need for this child care program, although there was a Head Start. I left Head Start because it was mostly for welfare parents or parents who were far below the poverty level. People who were working couldn't qualify. There were any number of people who were begging for care for their children, because not one day care center would accept a black child anywhere in Las Vegas.

I had this friend who was the wife of the Methodist minister at that time. We'd go merrily down to this preschool down on Fourth Street. The director was the wife of one of the lawyers in town. We just walked in like we thought that there was no problem--just a little child about four years. The director walked very quickly up to this old counter and said, "Oh, oh, we don't take Negro children." She said, "The powers say that I *positively* must *not* take black children or Negro children." That was way back in the late 1960s.

I wondered often, did people really tell these people not to accept black people? Several people had child care centers, and they would tell me, if I went some place and asked about their policy, "We were told by the power structure that we must not take Negroes." I think people were more or less fearful. By the "power structure" they meant the city--the commissioners and mayor. I don't know how they did it. They may have done it in the process of their commission meetings. When they discussed it they might have said, "Well, we can't allow this to be done. It would hurt our business."

First I started trying to work with working parents, but the EOB said, "No, you can't do that." I had those children separate, because I had the Westside School. Then I had 17 great big rooms; I had plenty of room. But they said, "No, you can't do that, either..." When they said I couldn't do it, it was just another way of cutting me down, I think. Anyway, we went ahead and we set up this school for children who cannot qualify for Head Start, and it has been very successful. So we've been operating that ever since 1977. It's a non-profit school; any child can go.

For a few years I used to write proposals and get funds through community services grants. Now they have put *all* of the money into EOB. All the grant money has gone

into EOB. They've done the same thing in several counties. I guess it was easier for the government to do it that way. We get no money at all from EOB now. Our parents pay very well--\$35 a week. Most of the people who live in this area have jobs that pay considerably less than what you would consider normal, so we can't charge too much.

We have a very nice building we rent. The project was built about 15 years ago, and HUD [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development] requires any donor to also provide recreation for people. So, this building is quite large and quite nice. We have a pretty good budget. United Way gives us a grant every year. We get food through USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] and the Department of Education in the state. So we do very well.

We give the children three meals a day, and we provide an educational program. We open at 7:00 and we close at 5:30. Now, this doesn't mean that the children stay all day. You have parents who go to work at different hours, so we try to open early enough so that the parents, no matter how early they go, they can bring the children in. They may pick their children up at around 3:00 or so. The people who bring their children in about 9:00 pick their children up about 5:00. It has worked out very well. We've had a lot of people say that the parents are very much pleased.

We have children from two years up through five, and we prepare children to enter kindergarten. That's one of the things that was creative that we could do here that we couldn't have done under the big umbrella of EOB. Some of the systems and methods that are used by the public school system, we can use. Our children, when they go into kindergarten, are already familiar with whatever they will be learning there. Most of them come from disadvantaged families, and do not have the

same opportunities to get the kind of training that the *average* child got in a home that had more to offer.

I'm more or less creative. I want to do things...I want to be sure that we make a change. You have certain rules and regulations that you just follow if you're in a big organization. When you are not in a big organization you can think about what you're doing; you can try different things. I did this in Maywood, before I came here. If you're working under a big umbrella, so to speak, you do whatever the plans are. Everybody does the same thing.

I'm resigning soon from Operation Independence, not because I necessarily *want* to resign, but because I'll be 81 years old next month, and I think that's long enough. [laughs] I've been directing that center for 21 years, including the time under the EOB.

I expect the school will carry on; I hope so. I think United Way will continue to support us, and I think we'll continue to get the food from the USDA. We train our own teachers. We do not hire certified teachers; we do not compete with the public system. We have some very fine teachers, and we have a couple of college graduates. Some of them are just high school graduates, but they make *excellent* teachers--some of them do. Some people are just teachers, although they may not have the credits or the degree that is required by the public schools. I have been fortunate enough to be able to get people who were actually experts in the field of early childhood education. My first teacher got her Ph.D. using Operation Independence as a subject for research. We had two of them who did that.

EPILOGUE

I never thought of myself as a community leader. I am just one of the people who have the desire to help right the wrongs, to do whatever I can to make things better, especially for those of us who have been disadvantaged. I do not consider myself in any way an outstanding leader of any sort. There are some things that I have been very much concerned about all of my life, and I've tried to do whatever I could. I think if I had considered myself a leader, I would have been very much more active politically. I would have tried to run for an office every election time. I think I would have tried to call people together and tried to show them where I could do this and I could do that, and I haven't done any of those things. If someone wants to say that you were able to get into some places and do a few things with the help of other people... if they want to call that leadership.... But it's not what *I* would consider leadership.

I think my most significant contribution was to secure legal protection from being discriminated against. I had the privilege of speaking before the legislature during

governor Sawyer's administration, and to participate in activities that brought attention to the things that we were suffering. I don't classify myself as an educator, but I have made some contributions to extending education to blacks over the past 21 years. I have also been pleased to be able to participate in activities that involved not only black people, but white people--such as becoming a member of certain boards, to give me an opportunity to express myself according to my concerns.

I'm still not satisfied with the amount of progress that we have made educationally, to be specific. I'm concerned about our young people who are involved with dope and other things that certainly will not add to our progress, and I would like to be able to do something in those fields. I have noted recently that the number of blacks being admitted to college is much less than in the past few years. Each year it seems there are fewer, when there should be more. We have been behind in this particular area through the years. I believe that we should work toward getting more of our young people into college.

As for the future for blacks, I am not too optimistic at this time--less optimistic than earlier in my life, because now I know more about the realities of life. When you're young, you think, "Well, I can do this, and I can do that, and this can be done, and that should be done." You have no experience and no realization of what might prevent you from doing these things. You know now that some of the things that you once thought that you could do just haven't been done, because there were so many realities that just would not allow you to accomplish them. Later in life we begin to find these things.

* * * * *

It's surprising how much national leadership means. For instance, how people and policies change from time to time. Years ago, I was very optimistic when we had presidents such as Franklin D. Roosevelt and Mr. Kennedy, Mr. Truman, who did many things that, though many times did not definitely plan for *our* progress, they *did* help. There was something throughout the country, there were actions and expressions of Americans. It seemed that we were sort of working toward the realization of a dream, not just due to what our Dr. Martin Luther King said. But I think we are losing it somehow. I really do. And I believe that, to a great extent, it is due to the national leadership.

I think Las Vegas is just a part of the national picture, but I believe Las Vegas has potential for blacks, because of the wide open spaces and because of the opportunities for people to come in and start to establish business. In other cities everything has already been done. Here, there is really an opportunity to build and do *new* things and to develop in a way that we couldn't develop in many other cities.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Miller family, ca. 1920, in Chicago. L. to R.:
Lubertha, her father, Golden, and her mother, Mary.
Courtesy of Lubertha Johnson.



Depressed living conditions in Westside Las Vegas in 1942 meant no plumbing, paved roads, or electricity. *Courtesy of the Nevada State Museum and Historical Society.*



Opening night at the Moulin Rouge Hotel, 1955. L. to r.: Lubertha Johnson, unidentified, Louise Leggroan, and Mr. and Mrs. Eddie Lofton. *Courtesy of Lubertha Johnson.*



Westside businessmen met in 1961 with Governor Grant Sawyer to discuss employment of blacks in the gaming industry. L. to r.: Donald M Clark and Charles Kellar. Also present at the meeting was William Bailey, not pictured.
Courtesy of the Donald M. Clark Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library.

Special thanks to Rich Johnson for his assistance
in producing photographs used in this work.

ORIGINAL INDEX: FOR REFERENCE ONLY

In order to standardize the design of all UNOHP transcripts for the online database, they have been reformatted, a process that was completed in early 2012. This document may therefore differ in appearance and pagination from earlier printed versions. Rather than compile entirely new indexes for each volume, the UNOHP has made each transcript fully searchable electronically. If a previous version of this volume existed, its original index has been appended to this document for reference only. A link to the entire catalog can be found online at <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/>.

A

Anderson, James, 17

B

Back-to-Africa movement, 6. *See also* Universal Negro Improvement Association

Bailey, Bob, 58

Baker, Josephine, 39

Barnett, Herman K., 13

Basic Magnesium, Inc. (Henderson, Nevada), 13; discrimination at, 17-18, 19

Bennett, Marion, 43-44

Blacks, discrimination against, 2-3, 5, 6-8, 9-10, 13-14, 15, 17-18, 20-21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 32, 34, 37-40, 41-44, 49, 52-54, 55-56, 59-60, 64, 70. *See also* Race relations

Bonanza Village (Las Vegas), 45-46

Boulder Dam (Nevada-Arizona), 27

Brown v. Board of Education, 42

Bruno, Andy, 33

C

Cahlan, Albert E. "Al," 59

Cahlan, Florence Lee (nee Jones), 60

Cahlan, John F., 59

Cannon, Howard, 48, 49

Carver Park (Las Vegas), 13-28; living conditions at, 14-15, 17; race relations at, 23-24, 25; recreation at, 16-17, 23; Tenants Council at, 16-17, 18

Central Mississippi College (Kosciusko, Mississippi), 4-5

Chicago, Illinois: blacks in, 38, 55

Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), 11

Civil rights bill, 48, 49, 65

Cook, Catherine, 18, 19

Cook, Reverend, 22

Cragin, Ernie, 37, 55-56

Cruise, Lester, 21

D

Democratic party, 56

Depression (U.S.), 11

Dobbins, Eslie, 18

Dobbins, Leslie, 18

DuBois, W. E. B., 10

Du Sable, Jean Baptiste Pointe, 55

E

Economic Opportunity Board (Clark County, Nevada), 68-69, 70

Ensley, Boysie, 31

F

Fox's Restaurant (Las Vegas), 38

G

Garvey, Marcus, 6

Gay, James "Jimmy," 65

Gilbert, Chet, 32-33

Gragson, Oran K., 56

Grant, Archie, 19-20

Greenspun, Hank, 60-61, 62, 64

H

Hawthorne, Nevada, 25
Hoggard, Mabel, 38, 41

J

Jarlson, Alan, 61
Jews, 9, 10, 38, 60
Johnson, Lubertha: civil rights activities, 10, 38-39, 48, 49-51, 52-54, 59, 61-66, 73; employment, 11-12, 13, 14, 27-29, 30, 52, 67-72; family/ancestors, 1-5, 6-9, 10, 11-12, 28, 29-30; and Operation Independence, 67-72; religion, 5, 21-22; schooling, 3, 4-5
Johnson, Roland, 33

K

Kellar, Charles, 42

L

Las Vegas, Nevada: civil rights, bill, 48-49; gambling clubs/casinos/hotels in, 27, 33, 38-39, 64-66; hospital in, 52-53; housing in, 13-16, 19-21, 24, 25, 28, 35, 45-46; integration in, 41, 42-44; Jews in, 38; local politics, 55-58, 61-66; Mexicans in, 36, 38; newspapers in, 59-61; race relations/discrimination in (*see* Race relations; Blacks, discrimination against); schools in, 41-44. *See also* Westside
Las Vegas Review-Journal, 59-60
Las Vegas Voice. *See* *Sentinel Voice*
Lofton, Elizabeth, 18-19

M

Mabel Hoggard Sixth Grade Center (Las Vegas), 43
McCants, Arthur, 23, 27
Marble Manor (Las Vegas), 35-36
Maywood, Illinois, 8, 9
Melrose Park, Illinois, 8
Miller, Abe, 64-65
Miller, Golden, 1, 3-4, 5, 6-7, 11-12, 28
Miller (Golden) family, 1, 3-4, 5, 6-7, 8-9
Miller, Jack, 2-3
Miller, Mary, 1, 4, 5, 7, 9
Millwarden ranch (Clark County, Nevada), 29-30
The Missile. *See* *Sentinel Voice*
Moulin Rouge agreement, 61-66
Moulin Rouge casino (Las Vegas), 32

N

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), 10, 23, 27, 47-54, 57
Nevada Voters League, 57

O

Oakey, Tom, 29-30
Operation Independence (Las Vegas), 67-72

P

Petrie, Peggy, 50
Pittman, Terea Hall, 47
Project Madison (Las Vegas), 46

R

Race relations, 2-3, 5, 6-8, 9-10,
13-14, 15, 17-18, 20-21, 23-24,
25, 26, 27, 29, 32-33, 34, 37-40,
41-44, 46, 47-54, 55-56, 59-66,
70, 73-74
Republican party, 56
Roger Williams University (Nash-
ville, Tennessee), 10-11
Rudiak, George, 48

housing in, 13-14, 20, 21, 34-
36; police force in, 33; schools
in, 41-42, 67-68, 69, 70-72
Westside Credit Union, 52
White, Tony, 68
Willard, Bill, 51
Williams, Franklin, 48
Williams, Paul Revere, 15-16, 19
Wilson, Woodrow, 52, 56
World War II, 26

S

Sentinel Voice (Las Vegas), 60
Siegel, Benjamin "Bugsy," 33
Simmons, John L., 21-22, 56-57
Slavery, 1, 2, 5, 10
Southern Nevada Hospital (Las
Vegas), 52-53
Stevens, Reverend, 22

U

Universal Negro Improvement
Association, 6
University Medical Center (Las
Vegas). *See* Southern Nevada
Hospital
Urban League, 10, 11

V

Victory Village (Las Vegas), 13, 23

W

Walbroek, Elaine, 67, 68
West, Charles, 57, 60
West Las Vegas, Nevada. *See*
Westside
Westside (Las Vegas), 13-15, 20-
23, 25, 26, 27, 30, 31-36, 40, 59,
66; anti-poverty programs in,
67-72; businesses in, 32-33;
churches in, 21-23, 33-34; gam-
bling clubs/hotels in, 31-32;

